Encounter

September 1976 50p

Mr X . . . 30 Years On

GEORGE KENNAN

In a long conversation with GEORGE URBAN, America's famous diplomat/historian reflects on the future of the USA, its foreign policy as a Super-Power, his changed views of Soviet Russia & the Cold War, and the rising prospects of Euro-Communism

Francis King
Story

Jacques Barzun
Remembering Lionel Trilling

David Moller
Ill Fares the Welfare State

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Poem

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Edited by Melvin J Lasky & Anthony Thwaite

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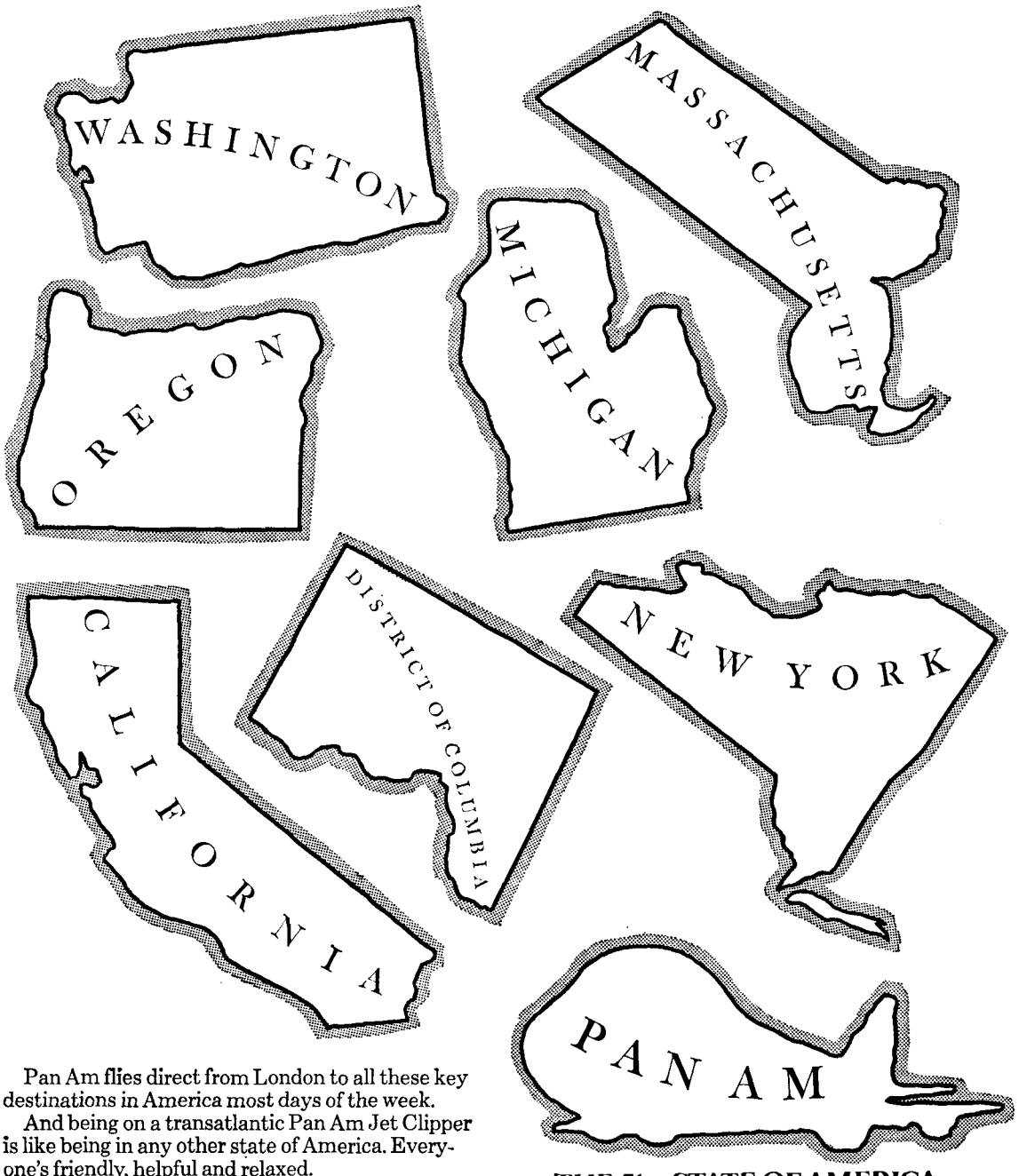

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SCHOOL CROSSING *(story)* 3 *Francis King*

A CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE F. KENNAN: FROM CONTAINMENT . . . TO SELF-CONTAINMENT 10 *George Urban*

DR SPACELEY-TRELLIS 44 *Michael Wharton*

COLUMN 50 *R*

POETRY

SPIRALS 179_ 53 *John Fuller*

Geoffrey Grigson 9, *Frank Ormesby* 81

NOTES & TOPICS

ILL FARES THE WELFARE STATE 58 *David Moller*

EUROPEAN NOTEBOOK 62 *François Bondy*

BOOKS & WRITERS

TELL IT SLANT 65 *Anthony Thwaite*

THE NOVEL & THE MARKET 69 *David Lodge*

MONEY & SEX & SO ON 76 *James Price*

MEMOIR

REMEMBERING LIONEL TRILLING 82 *Jacques Barzun*

DOCUMENT

From a Secret Moscow Tape (Robert C. Toth) 94

LETTERS 89

AUTHORS 96

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BIG STORY

by Peter Braestrup

How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet-1968 in Vietnam and Washington

Hanoi's dramatic Tet offensive of February-March 1968 had a significance far beyond any military gains or losses by either side, for its impact on the American public helped to topple a President, Lyndon Johnson, and led to the fading of support for the Vietnam War. Thus it becomes absolutely crucial to examine how American journalism—both print and broadcast—covered this historic event, what perceptions it conveyed to the readers and viewers at home. Using Tet as a case history in depth of the press portrayal of the war in Vietnam, Peter Braestrup—who covered the war himself for both the New York *Times* and the Washington *Post*—has compiled a remarkable document that reflects the analysis of millions of words published in newspapers and news magazines and broadcast over radio and television, the examination of thousands of feet of TV film, and interviews with scores of participants. Reportage by leading journalists (some of whose reputations were created in Vietnam) appears in the work, and their reports and commentaries are matched—not against official claims or a critic's polemics—but against the facts and resources available to news organizations at the time the original accounts were written. The key question Braestrup persistently asks is: What were the available "facts" at the moment when a particular event occurred, and how were those "facts" reported? The answer is inescapable: First news reports are always partly wrong; in the reporting of Tet—which included some courageous, thoughtful coverage—*much* was wrong. The book also includes an appraisal by Burns W. Roper, the noted public opinion analyst, of all the pertinent polling responses before, during, and after the Tet offensive; Roper's finding is that President Johnson (and his critics) thoroughly misread the initial public reaction to Hanoi's coordinated assault on South Vietnamese cities in 1968. Altogether, this is a landmark work—the first dispassionate analysis of the role of the U.S. press in the Vietnam War, and the most extensive study ever made of how print and electronic newsmen cover a major event.

Peter Braestrup has been an investigative reporter for the New York *Herald Tribune*, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, and a member of the Washington Bureau of the New York *Times*. After covering Algeria, Paris, and Southeast Asia for the *Times*, he joined the Washington *Post* in 1968 as Saigon bureau chief. He is now editor of publications for the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars at the Smithsonian.

This book will be of particular interest to newspaper, magazine, radio, and TV journalists; military staff; the Foreign Service; public information agencies; and foreign affairs groups. It should be added to general as well as specialized libraries. This most definitive study—a case history of the U.S. press covering an important event—is essential reading for every citizen considered "informed."

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Francis King

School Crossing

THESE DAYS it seemed as if his glasses were never clean. Yearning, importunate or mischievous, the small hands would reach out, soiling and smearing; and it was as if they soiled and smeared everything at which he looked. The garden at which he had laboured for many years, the house filled with the antiques inherited from his first and now dead wife, even the youthful face of his second wife: all seemed to have lost their pristine bloom. "Don't!" he would ward off the hands. But the twins would think this some kind of game and, laughing hysterically, twisting and lunging, they would hurl themselves upon him. Sometimes he would be rough with them, repelling them with all his force, and then a bewilderment would suddenly freeze their half-formed features and he would see the same bewilderment on the face of their mother, as though he had all at once changed into someone else. He was always wiping the glasses. On a handkerchief. On the end of his tie. On a paper-tissue or a table-napkin or a sheet of lavatory paper. But the imprints of those two pairs of hands perpetually renewed themselves, just as the imprint of those twin lives now perpetually marked each hour of his existence.

It must have been the glasses: the obvious explanation. The glasses and some freak of light as the late sun filtered down through a jagged line of conifers on that late autumn afternoon. It was the old drive that he knew so well, up the hill from the town. He had passed the Smugglers' Rest, with its faked creosoted beams, its plastic chairs and tables set out in the hope that some hardy travellers might be tempted to eat or drink outside, its neat hedges, neat flower-beds, neat paths; then the low line of red-brick Council houses; then the notice, glinting briefly in the setting sun, SCHOOL CROSSING. School, his school. Or what he had thought of as being his school until they had taken it from him. Teaching English part-time to foreigners now, he tried not to think of that brutal dispossession. Never went near the school. Never wished to see any of his former colleagues, unless a little furtive, a little guilty, a little shame-faced, they themselves sought him out. Never spoke about it, not even to Clare, the young science teacher whom he had married.

SCHOOL CROSSING. The Aston Martin, which he could no longer afford to run, leaped effortlessly up the hill; and suddenly, for a moment, there they were, boys and girls straggling across the road. Faces turned at the sound of the engine. Some drew back, others scuttled over to the further side, jostling, ungainly, undignified. But why should they be out of school as early as this? School holiday? No. He had braked to a halt. And then, to his amazement, he had seen that there was no one there at all. The late sun glinted on the crown of the road; the conifers soared up on either side, their green encrusted here and there near their summits with rust; somewhere far off an owl hooted. Odd. He could have sworn. But it was the glasses of course. He took them off, fumbled in his pocket for a handkerchief, found he had none and then, as so often, used the end of his tie. The tie seemed only to make them worse, leaving a halo over the left lens where before there had only been a streak. The sun sank with a strange abruptness, as though that patch of fire on the crown of the road had been doused with an invisible pail of water. Behind him a van was hooting. He looked in the mirror and saw that the driver looked like that Mason boy, son of a butcher, who had been one of the ring-leaders. . . . But he

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wasn't going to think of the school, never, ever.

He engaged the gears and the car leapt forward, like some beast suddenly unleashed to seize its prey. Odd.

HE DID NOT TELL Clare. One of the twins, the boy, had grazed his knee in a fall; and the other twin, the girl, had somehow contrived to break a Crown Derby cup. He had to hear about both accidents and he had to pretend that he cared more about the knee than the cup. Would he have mentioned what had happened on the hill if he had come home to peace instead of turmoil? He did not know. Probably not. There was a lot that he never mentioned to Clare: a whole secret life of hurt feelings, humiliation, disappointment and resentment. She herself was so candid, telling him all her most intimate thoughts and feelings, that she could not guess at the depth of his lack of candour.

"A good day, Mark?"

"Oh, not too bad. Not too bad."

He had picked up the *Times*; but as he was opening it, the boy twin began to scramble up on to his knees. One hand went out, crushing the paper. A shoe kicked his shin. Then the other hand was at his glasses. The child crowed with pleasure. Mark wanted to fling him from him. But instead he forced himself to laugh as he held the child's arms, one in either hand, and asked him: "Well, how is that knee of yours?"

Again the child tried to lunge; but his father held him firm. Then the girl came up from behind and her greasy fingers. . . . He looked across at Clare and he could hardly see her face. The smears seemed to be across it, not on his glasses.

"Oh, do take the children upstairs or into the kitchen or somewhere."

She got up silently and again he fumbled for the handkerchief that he had not got and again he raised the end of his tie.

SEVERAL DAYS passed before it happened again. Now it was dark and he was returning from a farewell party given by a group of jolly, noisy students from Norway. They had kept filling his glass even though he told them, "Look I've got to drive home. I don't want to be breathalysed, now do I?" He felt old and tired; a sour envy had invaded him, like the aftertaste of the acid Spanish wine, for the youth not merely of the students but also of his colleagues. He wondered how soon he could decently make his escape. A plump coquettish girl, with a downy moon-face and eyes of an arctic blankness and blueness—she had always sat just under his desk, arriving at class long before anyone else in order to secure that place—had swayed up to him and enquired tipsily: "You do not dance, professor?"

"My dancing days are over."

"But you will dance with me? A last dance?"

He shook his head. He forced himself to smile. "Neither a last dance nor a first dance. Not after all these years. Not even with you, my dear."

Surprisingly she had seemed not to be angered but delighted by the rebuff. It was what she must have expected. She laughed, throwing back her head and showing large, white, even teeth. Then she told the others: "Professor Clark says that his dancing days are over! He will not dance with me!"

"Shame!" cried one of Mark's colleagues, a spotty boy whom he particularly disliked.

"Oh, come along, Mark!" another colleague, a girl, cajoled him, taking him by an arm and attempting to drag him among the dancers. He had never asked her to call him Mark and he always tried to avoid calling her by any name, surname or Christian name. Some of the students began to clap her as she tugged and tugged at him, her face growing red under its swaying fringe of jet hair. But he would not yield. "No, I'm not going to dance. But you can give me something more to drink."

A Norwegian boy splashed some more of the vinegary white wine into his glass.

Well, it could have been that wine. Because he had been a little drunk as he had walked out, long before any other of the teachers, into the frosty December air. He had dropped the car-keys and he had felt uncomfortably top-heavy as he had searched over the asphalt of the yard for them, the tips of his fingers grazing themselves on its uneven surfaces. It must have been that wine and not his glasses, because as soon as he had got into the car, he took off the glasses and

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wiped them on a corner of a handkerchief that was still neatly folded in the trouser-pocket in which he had put it before setting out. Yes, it must have been that wine. What else could it have been?

It was misty as he drove up the hill and he passed only one car, crawling beetle-like ahead of him. He liked that surge of power as the Aston Martin devoured the little Fiat or whatever it was. It gave him a feeling of exhilaration; it never failed to do so. Which was why he had kept the car while at the same time urging on Clare a number of economies. The daily, holidays abroad, drinks before dinner, the laundry for his shirts: all must go before that car would go. Now that his joints so often ached and were stiff with rheumatism in the mornings, now that he found himself out of breath at the top of a hill or even of the stairs, now that one set of tennis, one swim, one orgasm, was enough for him, he found a compensation in the undiminished ferocity and pounce of that engine.

He could not see the crests of the conifers because of that pervading mist; at times he could hardly see the sides of the road as it curved up to the brow of the hill. The trees seemed to have merged into huddled, opaque masses as the fierce headlights picked them out. SCHOOL CROSSING. The cat's eyes winked at him and then died as he raced past. Slam on the brakes. Their terrified faces. Some began to run. Others frozen. The tyres screeched. The car all but went out of control. He peered into the mist, the car-door half-open and one leg hanging through it into the icy air. He had been about to rush out and shout at them. You bloody clots! Couldn't you hear my engine? Didn't you see my lights? And what are you all doing at an hour like this? Don't tell me that you're coming home from school! You might have got yourselves killed! But there was no one there, no one there at all; no target at which to direct his near-hysterical shock and rage.

He heard a chug-chug-chug behind him and the little beetle crawled up past the sign, slowed, all but stopped and then passed on. The driver was probably saying to himself, Odd. Why should he have stopped there? Alone too. But he seems all right. Better not to get mixed up in whatever it is. Perhaps he just wants a piss. The silence closed round the coughing of the little engine as it disappeared from view.

He raised the end of his tie; took off his glasses. But of course it had been the wine, it must have been the wine.

AFTER THAT HE BEGAN to dread having to pass the notice. But there was no other way to drive up from the town to the house: not, that is, unless he made an enormous detour. Enormous and costly too—that car devoured petrol with the same greed that it devoured the distance between itself and any other car. It was some silly kind of optical illusion. The trees with the sun low behind them or with the headlights thrust against them. Some trick of shadow. And the fact that he was tired, the glasses, the wine. Nothing odd about it really. As a child, waking up and seeing what seemed to be a stranger seated in the chair, a dark, humped stranger, with a white luminous face, he had screamed and screamed and screamed; but all it was (his mother rushing in) was his own clothes with the moonlight on them.... Silly. She had said that to him. Silly, silly boy. Why it's *nothing*!

It was nothing. But still the dread remained. As the Aston Martin climbed effortlessly up the hill, he would feel his mouth go dry, his heart would start to thump and he would peer ahead, wondering ... would it happen again this time? But days passed and it did not happen and soon that tension of both the body and the brain no longer gripped him. He had still not spoken of what had happened to Clare or anyone else; and now he would not do so, since obviously it was not going to happen again.

GOING INTO the town one Saturday to shop, they left the two children for a moment in the locked car while they changed their books at the library. It had been a day of nagging rain; and when they returned, they found that the seats of the car, its sides and even its roof were imprinted with the marks of small muddy feet. He could understand how, without meaning it, they might have soiled the seats by scrambling over them or even the sides by kicking out; but to reach the roof they must have made a deliberate, malicious effort. "Christ! What the

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hell have you been doing? Look at this! Look! Look!" He pointed here and here and here and the twins cowered and giggled, while Clare, in an effort to placate him, her face suddenly pinched and grey with apprehension, pulled a tiny, pathetic wad of a handkerchief out of her handbag and began to make ineffectual efforts to wipe away the mess.

"You'll only smear it! Leave it! I'll see to it when I get home."

"It'll all come out. You'll see. . . ." As so often, her fear of him made her turn on the twins. "Oh, stop that silly sniggering!"

"Why can't you control these bloody brats?"

"They're your brats too."

But somehow, deep inside himself, he never thought of them as his brats at all. They had come too late; and they had come unwanted.

Clare took the girl on her lap, leaving the boy in the back of the car. The boy was her favourite and so it was the girl to whom she gave this kind of preferential treatment. "Look, pet. I've got this lovely book for you. Look. That's a dog like the one that Ann has got, isn't it? A big dog, with a big bushy tail. And big teeth. But a friendly dog. Like Anna's dog. A dog with long, *long* ears." From time to time she would glance sideways at him with wary apprehension, wondering whether he would forget about the stains all over the interior of the car or whether they would make him difficult for the whole weekend. He drove thinking, Christ, what inanities!

The car seemed even smoother and even more powerful than ever; and that began to soothe him, as he pushed it up the steeper and steeper gradient, passing one car after another. Everyone seemed to have been shopping; every car was laden with children and baskets and carrier-bags and dogs and toys. SCHOOL CROSSING. There was a ramshackle saloon ahead of him, just beyond the notice; and then, as he pressed the accelerator to catch it up too and leave it in his conquering wake, suddenly, without any warning, the children began to stream across the road. In twos and threes. Shouting to each other. Laughing. One boy pushing another boy into a tall, solitary girl.

The impact of the braking threw the boy twin forward so that he struck his forehead on the seat in front. Fortunately Mark and Clare had both fastened their safety-belts, and the girl was secure in Clare's hands. The boy began to whimper, rubbing his forehead with a look of bewilderment on a face that had begun to pucker. Cars passed, the cars that they themselves had passed. Faces looked round. What a bloody silly place to stop! That's the way to cause an accident. Idiot. Someone hooted.

"Are you all right, darling?" The child began to wail. Clare touched the spot with blunt, cool fingers. "Does it hurt?" The child wailed louder.

"He's not hurt. You know how he always makes a fuss over the smallest things."

"He could have been hurt. Badly. What on earth did you stop like that for?"

"Didn't you see. . . .?" He broke off.

"See? See what?"

He thought quickly. "The hedgehog."

"Hedgehog?"

"In the middle of the road. I was afraid I'd run over it."

"I saw nothing."

"I saw it, Mummy! I saw it!" the girl began to shout. "I saw it! Big, big hedgehog!"

The boy was sobbing now. Clare said to the girl: "You'd better climb over to the back and change places."

"Why?"

"Because he's hurt his forehead."

"No!"

"Now, Sally, do what I tell you."

"It's my turn to sit in front!"

"You sat in front last time."

"Didn't."

"Did."

Oh Christ! It was with a cold, murderous rage that he engaged the gears and once more resumed the journey home. Would they never allow him any peace? Such was his fury against them that he hardly thought of those phantoms suddenly emerging out into the road. It was only later that he began to worry.

BILL EDMONDS—"Big" Bill as he was known all over the town to differentiate him from his partner, also Bill, who was small and fox-like—had once been Mark's closest friend as well as his doctor. Perhaps he still

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imagined that he was Mark's closest friend, since he was not particularly perceptive; but Mark had never felt the same towards Bill since that whole school business. Bill had not been loyal; or at least not loyal enough to say "my friend, right or wrong." His view that Mark had been partly wrong he had never concealed from him, even though he had conceded that Mark had also been partly right. "You can't run a comprehensive as though it were a small and select grammar school. You know exactly what you're doing and a lot of that staff of yours have no idea what they're doing at all. But that doesn't mean that you can ride roughshod over them." Later, when the affair had smashed Mark's career and smashed so much else, it had also smashed the peculiar intimacy that had joined the two men. They went on seeing each other; Bill went on prescribing drugs for Mark's blood-pressure, his insomnia and hay-fever; Mark went on tutoring Bill's bored, backward daughter in mathematics during the vacations; the two couples went on entertaining each other to dinner and going on holidays together and playing tennis with each other. But, as far as Mark at least was concerned, the friendship had ended.

Now Bill said: "Well, I'm damned if I can find anything wrong with you. The blood-pressure's a little lower in fact. The heart is fine."

"I must have imagined it." A statement more than a question.

Bill shrugged. "Some trick of the light", he said.

"I've thought of that. But it's happened at different times of the day. I mean, if it was a trick of the light, then if the light then changed, if it was coming from a different direction or a different source. . . ."

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"I suppose one might call it a hallucination."

"Well. . . ." Bill laughed, one massive buttock perched on the edge of the desk while he scratched at the other. He was always scratching himself.

Mark stared down at his linked hands and then darted an upward look. "You don't think. . . . Well, this isn't the beginning of a—a breakdown is it?"

"Christ no! I'd be much more worried if you were hallucinating all over the place at all times of the day. The fact that it's just that one particular spot and just that one particular hallucination. . . . But, in any case", he added hurriedly, "hallucination is not really the word for something so trivial."

"Then what is?"

Bill did not answer that. "You've been through a difficult time. Months ago, I know. But the after-effects of that kind of traumatic experience are often delayed. I should guess that you're a bit run-down. Liable to get depressed. Tired."

"Well, those children certainly never let me sleep after six or seven!"

"Let me give you a tranquilliser."

When Mark's first wife had been dying, Bill had also given her a tranquilliser, since there was nothing else to give her. "A happiness pill" he had called it to Mark; and certainly, whether because of her faith or because of that pill, she had died reasonably happy, when not in pain.

"Oh, I don't think. . . ."

"Now come on! Half my patients are on tranquillisers. Nothing to it!"

Mark had the prescription made up; but he pushed the bottle into the back of a drawer and forgot about it.

THE HALLUCINATION (if it was a hallucination) now came more and more frequently until it was happening almost every day. As he stepped into the car, sometimes even during his class, he would ask himself, I wonder if I'll see them today. They even appeared when he was giving another of the teachers, whose motorcycle had broken down, a lift up the hill. There they were ahead of him (he had purposely slowed the car, just in case), straggling out over the road with their brief-cases, trailing scarves, knee-high boots and loads of books. He could hear their loud immature voices and hear their loud immature laughter over the purr of the engine. He stopped and watched them, oblivious of his passenger, as they crossed over from the footpath to the lane on the other side. Some of the faces he had never seen before; they had come to the school since his day. Others he recognised and those he hated.

"Anything the matter?"

"What?" The last of them had gone. He

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attempted to pull himself together. "I was—was looking at that owl in the tree over there. He's often there at this hour."

"You must have the most fantastic sight. I can hardly see a thing."

"It's as though he waited for me. Every evening."

"Well, imagine that!"

Mark released the hand-brake. Suddenly he felt the sweat icy on his forehead, on his neck and in the small of his back.

HE AND THE FAMOUS OPHTHALMOLOGIST had been at the same Oxford college together; but there had always been a faint condescension even then from the spectacularly gifted man to the one far less gifted, and now it had grown more marked. The ophthalmologist, thin and sharply handsome, with his modish clothes and his modish haircut, might have been at least ten years younger than the schoolmaster.

"Fancy deciding to start a family so late in life! I'd no idea. It's as though I'd suddenly decided to get married."

"Well, we didn't really *decide* to start a family. It just happened."

"Still, it must be fun."

"Up to a point."

"I don't really care for children myself. Or animals."

Mark nearly said, "Neither do I." But some impulse of loyalty to Clare, not to the twins, restrained him from doing so.

"Which must mean that I have a shocking character", the ophthalmologist went on, obviously not believing anything of the kind.

When he had finished his examination he said: "Well, *I* can't find anything amiss."

(Mark did not care for the emphasis on the pronoun. Who did he think could find anything? A psychiatrist?) "The eyes are perfectly normal for a man of your age. In fact, I don't think I'd have even prescribed those glasses for you. You could easily do without them."

"Then what . . .?"

The other man shrugged. "You might have floaters. People with short sight often do. They're maddening things and, if you start to think about them—to become too conscious of them—they can cause you a lot of misery. I had a patient once, a woman, who even advertised in *The Times* for a cure for them. But there isn't one, of course. As I'd told her."

"I've had floaters. I know what you mean. But they could hardly account for my seeing a number of school children and seeing them in detail. . . . Could it?"

The ophthalmologist, who wanted to get home before going on to Covent Garden, sighed and shrugged. "You might be haemorrhaging slightly from the eyes from time to time. Though I see no evidence of it. I've often thought that that's all that Joan of Arc's visions amounted to. She never menstruated, you know. But she might have bled instead from the tissue of the eye. It's not unknown. Not at all. I had a woman patient who did precisely that."

"You don't suggest that I'm menstruating from my eyes?"

The two men laughed; but Mark's laughter was nervous and strained.

"Good God no! And in any case, you'd have reached the menopause by now and the bleeding would be over."

Again they both laughed.

The ophthalmologist put his arm around Mark's shoulder. It was as a patient that he thought of him now, not as a friend, and the gesture was a purely professional one. "I should guess you need a holiday. You look rather strained. You've aged a bit since that last Gaudy. Why not go away for a holiday?"

"I might do that."

"I should ignore the whole thing. Drive through your vision! Why not? Prove to yourself that there's nothing there at all."

"Yes."

The ophthalmologist realised that, so far from encouraging his patient, he had only discouraged him further.

MARK HAD LEFT his car in the station car-park. When he went to reclaim it there, he found two schoolboys examining it carefully. These schoolboys were not from the comprehensive but from the posh preparatory school a few miles outside the town. Mark knew that from their caps.

"That's a lovely job you've got there."

"Super."

"Fantastic."

Mark put his key in the door, smiling at

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them, saying nothing. He felt that somehow he must appease them.

"Must cost a fortune to run."

"What's the fastest you've done?"

"Oh, I've no idea. But she's fast."

"I bet she *is*!"

They hung around; probably they wanted him to offer them a ride. But he did not do so. He slammed the door and thought, you're like those others. Just like those others. Except that you wear those caps and you sleep in dormitories instead of at home and you have that disdainful upper-class drawl. I hate the lot of you. It was you who smashed me. Smashed me.

He drove off, not even bothering to look at them again.

It was a beautiful December afternoon and he ought to have been happy at the thought of going home after a day in a London that seemed to him, with each visit, to become more and more noisy, more and more crowded, more and more squalid. But he was not happy. He thought of that lucky ophthalmologist, who had been wise enough not to burden himself with a wife and children; who had visited the Caribbean for his last holiday and was going to visit East Africa for his next; who had been about to go to Covent Garden to see *Traviata*. Back home, Clare would complain that the dish-washer had broken down again or that a bulb needed replacing; the children would have broken something or lost something or soiled something; the stain would still be in the centre of the sitting-room carpet; the seat of the chair on the left of the fireplace would still be sagging; he would still be able to see where Clare had stuck that Crown Derby cup inexpertly together.

The Aston Martin began to leap up the hill. Would they be there, waiting for him among the trees? In a curious way, he felt that his fragile, failing body was now somehow fused with the strong, ever-powerful one of the car. I should ignore the whole thing. Drive through your vision, why not? Prove to yourself that there's nothing there at all. What's the fastest you've done in it? Well, I'm doing over seventy now and on a gradient like this. Lovely job. Super. Fantastic. His heart was now the throbbing heart of the engine; his nerves trilled with each of the explosions that sent it hurtling onwards.

SCHOOL CROSSING.

I should ignore the whole thing.

The impact was terrible. The car ploughed on and on. Then at last it jolted to a stop. Staring out ahead of him, he thought, This must be what is meant by seeing red. The whole windscreen was smeared with blood.

Or were the smears only on his glasses?

Ucko

Have you met Ucko? Poor Citizen
of Here, who would have been
  Elsewhere,

Poor Citizen of Here, who would not
be Here, and could not be
  Elsewhere?

Ucko stands below no arch, is
picking sticks and cobwebs
  from his hair.

Ucko cannot disown, ignore, accept,
revere, poor, poor exile from
  Elsewhere.

Geoffrey Grigson

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GEORGE URBAN

From Containment to... Self-Containment

A Conversation with

George F. Kennan

1. *Is America a Success?*

GEORGE URBAN: *I am struck by a cluster of broadly synonymous words which occur in your* Memoirs *with remarkable frequency. They all have to do with your personal anguish at seeing the world, and especially the contemporary world, governed by myopia, ignorance, and folly; and they express your loneliness and helplessness in the face of so much, as you see it, evoidable evil. You are "totally caught . . . totally felpless . . . in black despair . . . horrified . . . lonely . . . axtremely lonely . . . afflicted by loneliness . . . profoundly depressed . . . vulnerable." You have a "foreknowledge of disaster"; you raise "anguished objections"; you feel "tossed" into some "impossible position between two worlds"; and you are overcome by a sense "of the enormity of responsibility and of our inadequacy to it."*

Do these expressions denote an historian's pessimism distilled from the study of human affairs? Or do they perhaps represent the personal dilemma of an historian/diplomat whose scholarship has given him broad guidance as to what ought to be done in specific situations, but who is stultified and prevented from putting his judgment into action by the sheer inadequacy of the human condition—memories that are either too short or too long for the rational resolution of critical problems; analogies that are useful in one situation but misleading in another; perspectives that are relevant to some internal problem of the US but dangerously inadequate when applied to the Soviet Union or Japan; bureaucracies that are too sluggish and ill-instructed to know what is going on, and politicians sunk in a low but cocky provincialism?

KENNAN: "Loneliness" in my *Memoirs* is used mostly in connection with my early work in the foreign service. It refers only to the loneliness I felt in a governmental environment—the fact that my views and ideas were not extensively shared in the State Department, or if they were, they were shared by people who did not like to admit it. I have never suffered much from personal loneliness—I have a warm family, children, grandchildren and friends, and I do not regard myself as a lonely person in that respect. I do, however, regard myself in this way intellectually because I have gone my own way and attracted no great body of followers. Some of my friends would dispute this and say: "You *have* had enormous success as a lecturer and writer. Hundreds of thousands of young people in the United States have read your books and respect you. You *have* profoundly influenced them."

There may be an iota of truth in this, yet I cannot see the effect of what I have written or said on anybody in the American press or the younger generation; certainly not on our government, much less on other governments. I have always been regarded by the United States establishment as an odd-ball, and I *am* a strange mixture of a reactionary and a liberal. In this philosophical sense, I do consider myself a lonely person. It is perfectly true that in my attitude to what is going on in the United States and Western civilisation, of which I am a part, I am worried and profoundly pessimistic.

Now that is a possible philosophical attitude; it is not a way of life with me. In my day-to-day activities I do things that I think are useful, and I get a good deal of satisfaction out of them; yet I cannot see the end of it all. I do whatever I do more out of faith than any calculation that it may serve a larger purpose.

—The main source of your pessimism would appear to me to be the disintegration of our traditional order, going back, I suppose, to the 18th century. This would include industrialisation; the urbanisation of agrarian societies; the despoliation of nature; the degradation of taste; and the shallowness, and ultimately the disappearance, of religion as a public experience. In a revealing comment you speak of the "discomfort I

GEORGE F. KENNAN'S *distinguished career as a US diplomat and historian is summarised in "Authors" (p.96).* GEORGE URBAN *is a frequent contributor to* ENCOUNTER. *He lives in England, has taught at American universities and is the editor and co-author of, among other books, "Détente" (1976).*

We shall shortly publish Hugh Seton-Watson's European critique of George Kennan's views as expressed in these conversations.

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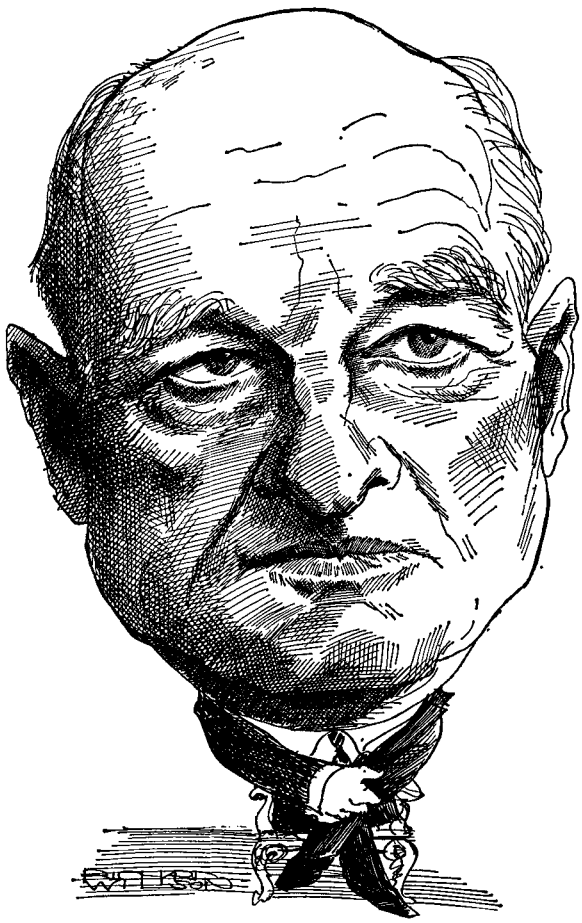
experience in my status as a contemporary of the 20th" century. You also tell us that "For years, Gibbon's dictum 'Under a democratic government the citizens exercise the powers of sovereignty; and those powers will be first abused, and afterwards lost, if they are committed to an unwieldy multitude' has lain at the heart of my political philosophy. . . ."

KENNAN: I am an American and, like all of us, and especially all of us who were born at the time I was born and brought up—before World War I—I grew up with a certain faith in American civilisation and a certain belief that the American experiment was a positive development in the history of mankind, that it was a good thing that the United States had come into being and developed as it had developed. I now see all these assumptions crashing to pieces around us. I do not think that the United States civilisation of these last 40–50 years is a successful civilisation; I do not think that our political system is adequate to the needs of the age into which we are now moving; I think this country is destined to succumb to failures which cannot be other than tragic and enormous in their scope. All this, of course, is not an easy thing to live with.



—Isn't it especially difficult for one brought up in the traditions of a foreign service officer who must surely feel it incumbent upon him to represent, not only the interests, but also the character of his country?

KENNAN: I have never shared a sense of shame about my country *vis-à-vis* other countries, which you see reflected in the American press and in the sentiments of a large part of liberal and radical youth, because I don't think we are that much worse than anyone else. I am in despair about this country, not so much from the standpoint of what it is doing to other people, which has not been that horrible, as from the standpoint of what it is doing to itself. This is what gives *me* a great sense of sadness.

But I don't see any wide appreciation of the self-destruction of the United States in the country at large—I don't see it in the press, not in the political leadership, not even in academic life. A few people—yes—and many who have misgivings of one sort or another, but there are very few people in this country who have taken the measure of the inadequacy, not just of our traditional institutions, but also of our habits of thought and assumptions.

Let me jump to a major conclusion: the older I get, and the more I occupy myself with the history of the past century in Europe and the United States, the more I am persuaded that the Industrial Revolution itself was the source of most of the bewilderments and failures of the modern age. This does not, of course, mean to say that there should have been no technological improvements in the early 19th century; but it does mean that the revolution in technology should never have been allowed to go uncontrolled as it did, that one should have examined each improvement in technology very carefully with a view to its total impact on society. I do not mean to reproach our forefathers; they were part of their time, they shared its scientific optimism, and they could not foresee the consequences of what they were doing. I am merely saying that I can't see the answer to the problems of modern civilisation in the framework of our highly urbanised industrial society. This society bears the seeds of its own horrors—unbreathable air, undrinkable water, starvation—and until people realise that we have to get back to a much simpler form of life, a much smaller population, a society in which the agrarian component is far greater

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again in relation to the urban component—until these appreciations become widespread and effective—I can see no answer to the troubles of our time.

In this sense I am, I suppose, an 18th-century person, and I'm persuaded that those of our forefathers who had their roots really back in the 18th century had more convincing values and better tastes than those whose roots were in the society that issued from the Industrial Revolution. Statesmanship, even in the United States, up to the end of the 18th century was largely rurally based—it came from people with estates in the country who moved to the cities to do specific things for a limited duration. George Washington himself was a case in point.

ONE OF THE DOMINANT elements in your intellectual temper seems to me to be aesthetic. You are deeply revolted by every form of ugliness, bad taste, and (my linkage is deliberate) disrespect of tradition. Again and again you plead in your books for the "recognition that if great masses of people are to be elevated out of degradation or vulgarity it is important that some people should set an example of graciousness and good taste. . . ." I am also struck by the preponderance of pastoral values in your personal aesthetics, and your portrayal of the good life in what one might call verbal tableaux of an idyllic, pre-industrial nature. And am I wrong to suspect that the tenderness with which you describe and eulogise the unsophisticated ways of the Russian people tells us something about the roots of your claim that you "had Russia in your blood", that there was "some mysterious affinity which I could not explain even to myself"? Was this affinity, I wonder, not really anchored in your yearning for the 18th century, which could be satisfied in the Soviet Union in the 1950s by simply observing and identifying with the life of the ordinary Russian?

Here, if I may quote from your Memoirs, *is George Kennan, United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, describing, right at the end of Stalin's rule (July 1952), Russian life on the private garden plots on the edge of the city of Moscow:*

> **"Everything takes place in a genial intimacy and informality: hammers ring; roosters crow, goats tug at their tethers, barefoot women hoe vigorously at the potato patches, small boys play excitedly in the little streams and ponds, family parties sit at crude wooden tables in the gardens under the young fruit trees. The great good earth of Mother Russia, long ignored in favour of childish industrial fetishes of the earlier Communist period, seems once more to exude her benevolent and maternal warmth over man and beast and growing things together; and only, perhaps, an American ambassador . . . is effectively isolated, as though by an invisible barrier, from participation in the general beneficence of nature and human sociability."**

KENNAN: I don't trust human beings to live successfully too far away from nature. We are all animals in part, and it does us good to be reminded of our affinity with growing things and the animal kingdom. I feel sorry for children who are brought up without any sense of intimacy with dogs and horses and pigs, because living near animals teaches us something about ourselves. A reasonably close contact with nature seems to me one of the great sources of psychic health. Some people would deny that and say: "The country people are just as crazy as anyone. Their vices may be different but that makes them no less reprehensible." There is something to that, too.

But speaking for myself, I cannot help but long for that kind of life. I am not an urban person, and I don't trust the great urban environment, especially of the contemporary sort. It is a fearfully polluting environment; the mere sewage that flows from our great cities is becoming a world problem. I don't think men were meant to live in such monstrous accumulations. The railway-based metropolis of the 19th century—the old London, or Berlin, or Edinburgh, or Chicago —was a marvellous city, and I have a certain nostalgia for that. But I have no such feeling for the fragmented and dispersed urban sprawls of the United States of the 1970s. The railway by its very nature tended to exercise a discipline on human habitation. It united people around the railheads, causing these astonishingly creative concentrations—the 19th-century city—to emerge where everything from commercial to cultural life gathered in the vicinity of one or two natural points of arrival and departure. The motor vehicle carries exactly the opposite discipline: it tends to explode and fragment things—to reduce wholes into small pieces and to disperse these in every direction. You have only to look at New York which was a great and most enjoyable city sixty years ago; today it is unfit for civilised living.

There is in America hardly any countryside left in the social sense. The great cities impress their characteristics through television and the motor car. They spill out like some great, slow-moving flow of molasses all over the countryside and change its nature. This has been a deplorable development, and I hate to see other people, whether under the Communist slogan of abolishing the differences between the city and the countryside, or under the universal slogan of modernisation, especially in the Third World, going the same way. It is an appalling regression.

—The situation in Britain is only marginally different from that in the United States. Unlike most European countries, Britain has no peasantry, and the life-style of the British farmer is governed by the same values as that of the urban Briton. But where the British situation is, to my mind, unique is that British society has, despite the Industrial Revolution, never fully embraced the ethos of industrial culture the way in which Germany and the United States have. The values of British education, of

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literature, of the stage, and screen are all loaded against industrial culture. Britain's poor industrial record since 1945 is probably one of the ways in which British resistance to the discipline of mass-production and uniformity expresses itself. If, as you say, the psychology of industrialisation is a bad thing, isn't the inability to earn one's living because the ethos of industrialisation has been insufficiently assimilated no less an evil?

KENNAN: I don't want to idealise the village or the countryside. In England, as in America, the village has always been the seat of great pettiness and nastiness. But I am convinced that a society which is predominantly agrarian is, with all its faults, a sturdier and healthier society in the long run than one which is predominantly urban. Certainly emotional freshness gets lost in an urban environment. Some of the best modern literature has been produced by people who came from the provinces, bringing with them the psychic wealth that lay with their upbringing, and had this freshness exposed to the great city. In this relationship one may concede the necessity of the large city as the opposite pole, or, if you like, the indispensable irritant. Of course, I don't for a moment imagine that the large city can be abolished. I would like to see it smaller, more concentrated, with a much higher percentage of people living outside it.

—The European image of the United States is almost entirely one of urban concentration—New York and Los Angeles are thought of, in their different ways, as the quintessential America. Yet the sort of sentiment you have just expressed about urbanisation is typically and traditionally American. "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man", Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1784. From Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright, most of America's intellectual and literary leaders have spoken out against the evils of the big American city: Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Henry Adams (to name no others). Isn't the interesting thing really that the anti-urban tradition does not hail solely, or even mainly, from Georgia or the Rocky Mountains, but comes every bit as much from the city intellectuals?

KENNAN: This is true. One of our difficulties is that this country staggers along on the relics of an agrarian philosophy and tries to apply it to what is really a thoroughly urbanised country.

In American popular culture small-town and agrarian ideals have continued to predominate. If you look at the old *Saturday Evening Post* (which went out of existence, not because it was losing popular appeal, but because it was losing advertising revenue) you will find that 90% of its famous covers showed small-town scenes. America still idealises its small town as it undermines and destroys it.

The tragedy is that neither our political institutions nor our inherited values have been adequate to the demands of the great city. Our most shocking national failure is the utter demoralisation and deterioration of these urban areas. And I can see no signs that it is being stopped. True, the medium-sized cities throughout the country are making strenuous and almost pathetic efforts to halt the process of urban decay—to try to restore community and cultural life to the centres of the cities; and I understand there have been limited successes in the Pacific North West and in the South, which is today perhaps the most interesting part of the United States. But I can see nothing that could halt the deterioration of New York and Chicago except the exhaustion of the supplies of motor fuel and the subsequent curtailment of the use of the motor car.

—Isn't your critique of the big city really a critique of the degeneration, as you see it, of American society and culture? In Democracy and the Student Left *(1968) you clearly connect one with the other:*

> **"I have the impression that the students who write these protesting letters are almost exclusively people of urban background, that student radicalism, in fact, is . . . an urban phenomenon. . . . There is [in American culture] no strong and coherent religious faith, no firm foundation of instruction in the nature of individual man, no appreciation of the element of tragedy that unavoidably constitutes a central component of man's predicament, and no understanding of the resulting limitations on the possibilities of social and political achievement . . . [the student's] estrangement from nature, his intimacy with the machine, his familiarity with the world of gadgetry, and his total lack of understanding for the slow powerful processes of organic growth, all these imbue him with an impatience and an expectation of an immediate connection between stimulus and effect. . . ."**

I noted a moment ago that your strictures of the big city were in line with the thinking of traditional American anti-urbanism. But I would now add that your emphasis, throughout your writings, on the inherently tragic element in human life, its finiteness and unpredictability, strike me as being "un-American", if you will; for it runs counter to the optimistic, problem-solving, this-worldly credo of American culture. I am not so much interested whether this is a genuinely untypical American attitude, as in the more personal question: Why should a distinguished American put so much stress on a clearly unanswerable aspect of the human condition? Or am I misguided in linking your attitude to the American background, and should I simply ask: why do you hold this particular view?

KENNAN: This is a deeply personal matter and almost one of religious conviction. The greatest deficiency of Marxist thought, which, after all, has penetrated the consciousness of a great many people in Western society who are not aware of being Marxists at all, lies in the assumption that the ills of society can be cured by tinkering with social relationships. This error, in turn, flows from

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the fact that Marxists attach no importance, and indeed give no recognition, to the element of tragedy that is built into the individual human experience itself. When I say that, I am thinking of certain well-known facts: that there are such things in life as accidents and tragic illness; that the people we love don't die at the same time as we do and *vice versa;* that there is bereavement; that people get old, that their power fails, that they have not accomplished what they would, and so on. No human life is without these tragic elements, and anyone who promises to create paradise on earth is perpetrating an inexcusable deceit. The Christian religion, whether one believes in it or not, had an answer to these problems of human exhaustion and failure; but the Marxist outlook does not, and this is its great weakness. It simply does not recognise the main problem in the lives of ordinary people.

—The fashionable thing among "progressive" intellectuals is to postulate the death of religion, especially Christianity, and to hope that a substitute ethic will somehow emerge from scientific humanism, ecology, emancipation, revolution or some combination of these (a somewhat déjà vu *idea at least since the French Revolution). But I understand from those who have tried to live by such a new ethic in the communal colonies of California that, when put to the test, the substitute ethic shows itself powerless to influence the minds of people, and the cry soon goes up for some genuinely spiritual concept, or else the ethic degenerates into a quasi-religious worship of human idols.*

KENNAN: As Dostoevsky and many others have pointed out, one has to be extremely wary of a secular idealism that does not plunge to the depth of this tragic element in human nature. After all, every totalitarian movement and every despotism in history professed to be serving the good of the people, while also saying that cruelty and beastliness were the means whereby the public good was to be achieved. I distrust people of good intentions who claim to be acting, not out of personal conviction, but on the imperatives of a superior order, for while they profess to love humanity, they are usually very uncharitable to those closest to them.

In practical life we must, on the strength of an entirely personal ethic, hold on to such elementary qualities as charity, decency, love and a willingness to put ourselves in the position of the man in distress. All this may strike you as trite and unctuous, but I deeply believe that kindliness and generosity in our personal behaviour, and a refusal to be beastly to others even by way of reaction, are both moral and pragmatic qualities of the highest order.

—One can envisage a move away from a shallow, ecularists conception of life under the impact of some cataclysmic event such as nuclear war. But can you see any such thing happening under less calamitous conditions?

KENNAN: In the middle of World War II I thought suffering would make people more thoughtful—that they would come to grips in a more enduring way with the ultimate problems of human life. And they did, for a time. I can recall that in Germany in 1941 the churches, especially the Catholic churches, were full; people wanted solace, and the Christian faith offered them a way of living with the horrible realities of the War. But after the War western societies everywhere—in England as much as in Germany—again yielded to the most appalling materialism.

Part of the answer may well be a greater moral understanding and authority among those who have the educational responsibility. In the 18th and 19th centuries in England, for example, a great deal of the educational burden was borne by the pastors. There are all kinds of things we can deplore or laugh at in their behaviour, but it is undeniably true that these men had a serious purpose and did address themselves to the spiritual dimension of life. Nobody does that today—least of all, goodness knows, our teachers!

—Organised religion—whatever we may think of the weaknesses and hypocrisies of the clergy—has surely served us well, at least in the sense that it has been a constant reminder that the spiritual condition of man is, or ought to be, a central concern of our culture and society. I am reminded that in Dante's Commedia *the Vestibule of Hell is occupied by the Indifferent, those "Who against God rebelled not, nor to Him/Were faithful, but to self alone were true/ . . . deep Hell rejects so base a herd. . . ."*

KENNAN: In Western culture the churches have kept their eyes on the moral responsibility of the individual in the face of his own conscience. This is not to be taken for granted. It is absent from the Chinese-Confucian concept of religiosity where there is no sin, only indiscretion or impracticability. But in the West, both in the traditions of Christianity and Judaism, we have been brought up to feel individual responsibility.

There is, in the United States, no one to hold people to that today—the churches have lost the power to do so, the state cannot attempt to do so, and our two political parties would not know how to begin to do so. They cater to what is basest in the American electorate.

—You expected the War to induce people to take a more thoughtful view of the human condition. Do you feel, then, that suffering, or felix culpa, *is the precondition of both receptivity in the public domain, and of creative individual enterprise, whether in the arts, literature or philosophy?*

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KENNAN: I used to think that, but I am no longer sure that suffering makes people better. People endure suffering; but, as soon as they can, they go back to what they were before. One has to distinguish between individual dispositions. There is always a small minority—perhaps 10 or 15%—who have values, insights, sensitivity far greater than the mass of their fellow beings, and it is very important how this pattern-setting minority behave. Beyond that, you have the mass of the people, perhaps 70%, who are the common run of humanity with their normal strengths and weaknesses. These people react to things rather than initiate them. At the far end of the spectrum you find a minority of villains and felons with whom society has to deal as best it can.

I believe education should take account of these differences. Those with outstanding abilities should be taught to be aware of their moral responsibility and to conduct themselves accordingly—which they are not always doing today. I am, in this sense, an inveterate élitist.

But to come back to the effect of suffering: when I said a minute ago that I was in despair about my country, I did specify that my despair is limited to our ability to solve America's problems with the approaches and assumptions with which we are trying to tackle them today. But that does not mean that the individual in the United States has been rendered intellectually sterile, that he has nothing to cling to. Since the First World War, American civilisation has produced, and I am sure it will continue to produce, a remarkable minority of artists, thinkers and writers. I see in this intellectual fertility, rising as it has done against a background of social failure, a parallel development with Russia. The Russians, too, have, both in the 19th and 20th centuries, been eminently unsuccessful in solving their problems as a civic society, and yet they have produced, over the course of 150 years, a remarkable literary, musical and philosophical culture. Very often the creators of this culture were extremely unhappy in their country. They were displaced, they were not appreciated, they were rebellious—but, of course, they spoke from, and against, a Russian environment and contributed a great deal to the world. (I am, naturally, thinking principally of Russia's great novelists and poets from Pushkin and Dostoevsky to Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn.) In other words, a society which is palpably unsuccessful in virtually everything it has set out to achieve can, nevertheless, bring forth from its midst a highly impressive and culturally seminal minority. Here, as I say, the American and Russian experiences run parallel.

—May I probe into this Russian-American nexus a little further? We have already referred to your personal affinity with a great many things Russian. Are you now saying there is a certain cultural convergence between Russia and the United States?

KENNAN: The temper of American intellectual life will, of course, always be different from the Russian. On the other hand there is a curious kinship between the American and Russian intellectual personality. It is much easier for some Americans to understand the Soviet Union than it is for most qualified Continental Europeans and Englishmen. There is a certain community in the collective experiences of the two countries which makes itself felt in the contacts between the two peoples. This is truly remarkable.

ISN'T THERE A CERTAIN ambivalence in your attitude to Russia? You love the Russian people, their language their literature, their sensitivity, and their capacity for a sublime sort of suffering; but, at the same time, you are very conscious that the Russian tradition of conducting public affairs and pursuing foreign policy objectives is entirely different from, and indeed irreconcilable with, the American tradition.

Your personal affinity with Russia needs no further illustration—"Russia had been in my blood." So let me rather quote your views of Russians as diplomats and neighbours as they appeared to you in Moscow in 1946. I have taken these sentences from a famous despatch you filed with the State Department in the Winter of 1946. It has, by the standards of 1976, a hawkish air about it, and is, I suppose, the precursor of your Mr X article in Foreign Affairs *and of the American policy of "containment", the rationale of which was spelled out by you in that article. (I might add that American "revisionist" historians of the Cold War have found equally cogent evidence in your writings, notably in your 1952 despatch "The Soviet Union and the Atlantic Pact", to show that you are also the father of the "revisionist" history of the Cold War.) You wrote in 1946:*

> **"Historically, the foreign affairs of Russia have developed along lines entirely different from those of the United States. Our most important foreign relations . . . have been along the lines of peaceable overseas trade. These have set the pattern of our thinking on foreign affairs. . . . Their [the Russians'] history had known many armistices between hostile forces; but it has never known an example of the permanent peaceful coexistence of two neighbouring states. . . . The Russians therefore have no conception of permanent friendly relations between states. For them, all foreigners are potential enemies. In examining a position taken by a foreign state, the Russians make no effort to look at it from the standpoint of the foreign state in question or from any fancy community of aims on the part of themselves and the state involved. They assume it is dictated by purposes which are not theirs, and they examine it only from the standpoint of its effect on them. If the effect is favourable, they accept it without gratitude; if it is unfavourable, they reject it without resentment. We could make it much easier for ourselves if we would face these facts."**

You then offer your famous rules of conduct: "Don't act chummy with them. . . . Don't assume a community of aims with them which does not really exist. . . .

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Don't make fatuous gestures of good will. . . . Do not be afraid to use heavy weapons for what seem to us to be minor matters. . . . Do not be afraid of unpleasantness and public airing of differences", and so forth.

KENNAN: I recognise the contradiction that is apparent here. Indeed (as I have often pointed out) all Russian reality is contradictory, and so perhaps are some of my attitudes to Russia. What I had in mind when I wrote the lines you have quoted was that the average person who is thrown into a position of political responsibility in Washington by our system is not the sort of person who would find it easy to understand Russian values. I was warning against trying to perceive Russia through untrained American eyes.

When I speak of the affinity between the two peoples I do not conceive of affinity as intellectual understanding—it goes deeper than that. It is a matter of manners, gestures, and approaches to problems; also there is something else which I I cannot readily define—a kinship that comes from being a citizen of a large continental country. There is a community of experience, especially between the Siberians and ourselves (and the Siberians and Canadians), which may be due to the fact that Siberian society, too, was a society influenced by the expansion of frontiers over the whole of the 19th century.

Once, sitting on the banks of the river Ob in Siberia, and watching small boys play with a raft they were making on the shores of the river, I suddenly realised how similar this was to Mark Twain's Mississippi: these little boys, too, had the sense of enormous space—that this river was flowing off into endless reaches. Neither their civilisation nor the American represented a confined world.

The Western Europeans, who live within much more closely defined conditions both geographically and culturally, have had to shape their behaviour within narrower confines. They are, all of them, a more disciplined society than either the Russian or the American. I am not talking about political discipline but individual behaviour at grass-root level. Here there is a spontaneous meeting of minds and temperaments between ourselves and the Russians that makes it easy for us to get along with each other.

—There are, of course, so many levels at which it is possible to speak of "affinities" between Russia and the West, and the United States in particular, that I should really like to know what particular elements in the spectrum of affinities you would elect to stress as providing the key to the others. Clearly you are not referring to the kind of mid-19th-century revolutionary scientific optimism which runs through Chernyshevsky's novel What is to be done? *(a title Lenin plagiarised for his pamphlet), nor, I take it, to the supposed similarity in the destinies of Russia and America which Tocqueville pointed out. But, on the other hand, you may not be far from sharing Pitirim Sorokin's view, put forward just after World War II, in a very different political climate, that there is a historical convergence between Russia and the United States in matters of "society, culture and personality." But if one believes with Herder (as I do) that each nation's culture is specific and incommensurable with any other culture, then isn't the whole idea of affinity very much open to question?*

KENNAN: If I were to point to a single factor at the expense of others, I would say there is a tangible link between the naïve earnestness and fundamental sincerity of America, especially as one finds them at their most significant in the Midwest (it is much diluted on both the East and West Coasts), and the immense moral seriousness which characterises the novels of men like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The affinity is unmistakable. It is very important to remember that, despite America's many calamities in recent years, there is still less cynicism among most Americans than there is in Western Europe. Of course the big-city intelligentsia is closer to the mentality of Western Europe; but the heart of America is singularly attuned to the self-searching, fundamentalist message of the 19th-century Russian novel and indeed to its current variants.

—Would you say that in both cases the search for truth is a national preoccupation because, in one way or another, both countries have lived with the lie?

KENNAN: I would—with strong qualifications. In the case of Russia the lie has been obvious —both under the Czars and under Communism. In America we cannot talk of "the" lie in the same sense at all. Nevertheless I attribute a great deal of the decadence and demoralisation of American civilisation to the domination of the whole process of communication by the advertising industry. This is a great and fundamental evil, for it pollutes the entire content of information that flows back and forth in the country. It debauches and misuses the intelligence of the listener and viewer; it de-trains people for any sustained attention to the truth. It is pernicious in every way. Even our sporting events are being operated for financial profit and tend to look more and more like the gladiatorial contests towards the end of the Roman Empire.

—My own impression of American sporting events is rather different. American football, for example, with its massed bands, split-second gymnastics, and anthem-singing supporters reminds me of nothing so much as Prussian military drill in Wilhelmian Germany. Two hours I spent watching Indiana University play Utah were enough to make me question my own doom-laden

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judgment that American society was decadent—for wasn't this disciplined display of the American people an assertion of its national strength and identity? Could one withhold admiration from the sheer, overpowering presence *of the American people in all its vulgar majesty? If, I reflected, week after week tens of thousands of young Americans are happy to submit to the elaborate, carefully rehearsed, uniformed drill which these parade-ground occasions require, there can't be all that much wrong with the basic morale of the United States. And couldn't it be that this celebration of American football served as a popular outlet for the same naïve earnestness which you have just mentioned as explaining the affinity which you feel exists between Russians and Americans? Am I drawing unjustified conclusions?*

KENNAN: I think you are. American football is a pageant—it is theatre—and if you consider the terrible forms which the aggressiveness of human beings can assume, the American football game seems to me a harmless way of getting aggression out of one's system. People have to have displays; they are lightning-conductors. I was myself at military school when I was a boy, and I much enjoyed close-order drill. We were very proud of ourselves.

Now you may be right in thinking that American football behaviour is a paradigm of how Americans as a nation might behave *in certain circumstances*. I am sure one could unite the American people and that they would be capable of tremendous efforts; but, unfortunately, I can't see them uniting except on a primitive level of slogans and jingoistic ideological inspiration. I am not sure that people ever unite to perform significant deeds except in response to simplistic appeals in questions of national defence. I dislike this intensely—it is a form of "hurrah patriotism" which expresses itself in our country today in the programmes of people like Admiral Zumwalt: mischievous ideas which would, if they were permitted to be put into action, lead to apocalyptic nuclear confrontation.

2. Can America Continue as a World Super-Power?

NO ONE IS MORE AWARE *than you that the internal American political process is diffuse, impenetrable and chaotic; and that it is, from such a base, extremely difficult to pursue a consistent and effective foreign policy, especially* vis-à-vis *a power that has a long-term strategy. We have, of course, been aware, at least since Tocqueville, that the political perspectives of democracy are always short-range and therefore debilitating. But this awareness has not helped us very much—rather has it added to our problems.*

Since World War II, an unfamiliar responsibility—world leadership—has devolved on American shoulders, but it would seem that neither the American people nor the United States government is willing, or indeed able, to do justice to it in terms of adjusting the American system to its requirements. Can the system be reformed with this end in mind? Is it, on current showing, likely to be so reformed?

KENNAN: I can see no way in which the system can be reformed. I am afraid there is long going to be a tendency for individual legislators and politicians in this country to try to exploit the foreign policy process for their own domestic political ends. As long as they do this, they inflict a sense of incoherence on American foreign policy, because we are pushed into taking actions in the foreign field, not for their effectiveness in the matters with which they purport to deal, but for their ulterior function here at home. It is a self-defeating attitude which reminds me of the tennis player who takes his eyes off the ball because he is too conscious of the problem "How-am-I-going-to-look-hitting-the-ball?", instead of concentrating on what he is doing.

I don't take this to be a great black mark against America, or a sign of the inferiority of American society. If you are going to govern, from a single capital, an area as large and variegated as that which constitutes the United States—everything from Florida to Alaska, and from Northern Maine to Southern California—the only way you can govern without coercion is by a never-ending, elaborate series of compromises between political groups and lobbies; and this method of governing the United States is quite possibly better than the alternatives would be.

But if that is the only way the country can govern itself, then it ought to recognise that this places certain limitations on what it can hope to do in the field of foreign affairs, and that its policy should be a very restrained one.

I do not like the word "isolationism" because it has connotations that are too extreme; but I would say that such a country ought to follow a policy of minding its own business to the extent that it can. When I say I am an "isolationist"—which in a sense I am—I do not advocate that we should suddenly rat on NATO and abandon our West European allies. I don't even mean that we should do anything abruptly to curtail our commitments anywhere. To do so would be a new offence in its own right. But I do feel that we should not accept new commitments, that we should gradually reduce our existing commitments to a minimum, even in the Middle East, and get back to a policy of leaving other people

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alone and expect to be largely left alone by them. We greatly exaggerate the hazards of doing so. Even when people talk, as they now do, about the consequences of Soviet interference in Angola, the dangers of what is really involved in Angola for the United States are egregiously exaggerated. It may be there are dangers for the *Angolans*; but for us the dangers are not significant.

—Don't you think this kind of attitude would leave the world wide open to Soviet territorial and political expansionism? Wouldn't it, above all, deliver Western Europe to the Soviet Union?

KENNAN: We should not cut our commitments to Western Europe abruptly. But Western Europe has, since the War, leaned on us more heavily than is good for Western Europe itself. We have been a form of escape for our European allies. They have seen us as saving them the necessity of having a policy either towards Eastern Europe or Germany, which is, of course, very agreeable to them; but it must now end. A gradual American withdrawal, and a gradual assumption of much greater responsibilities by the West Europeans for what is, after all, principally their own defence and political future would be all to the good.

—You don't think a "Finlandisation" of Western Europe would eventually result from granting the Soviet Union what it would probably interpret as an unlimited right to prospect the world for influence?

KENNAN: The comparison that has been drawn between Finland's position *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union and that of Western Europe is neither fair to the Finns—whose position is not all that weak or humiliating (they have materially *increased* their freedom of action in the last 25 years)—nor is it fair to Western Europe, because the latter's relationship to Moscow rests on wholly different geopolitical, demographic and economic realities than that of Finland. There is, for example, no reason that I can see why Western Europe should not put up a respectable conventional force of its own. In terms of population and industrial potential, Western Europe is at least fully equal to the Soviets. That it hasn't the military muscle which it ought to have is entirely due to a lack of political will. Western Europe is far too addicted to its material comforts, and values prosperity far too highly, to make the necessary sacrifices. But if that is so, "Finlandisation", if it ever comes, will be a self-inflicted wound.

You talk about the defence of Western Europe—I am wondering whether "defence" is the right word, and whether the greatest danger to Western Europe is not within itself, for the general decadence of Western European society is one of the most tangible realities that hits even a fleeting visitor. I won't go into details, but let me just mention a random sample of ominous developments such as the inability of Britain to improve its industrial productivity which is, incredibly, less than half of that of Germany, and to put the British trade union system on a modern footing. I am equally amazed by the inability of Denmark and Holland to put an end to the pornographic invasion that has overcome them. This betrays a terrible lack of self-confidence and a total confusion of values. The same thing is true of the German student disorders which still remain a serious matter in a number of universities. And what is one to think of the failure of the Berlin Senate to prevent the destruction of the Free University? The challenges are brutal and ubiquitous—the responses pitifully feeble or non-existent. Western Europe has lost a sense of the fitness of things, and that *is* the meaning of decadence.

I sometimes wonder what use there is in trying to protect the Western world against fancied external threats when the signs of disintegration within are so striking. Wouldn't we be better advised if we put our main effort into making ourselves worth protecting?

A couple of years ago, in the course of our usual summer cruise in the Baltic, my family and I put in at a small Danish port which was having a youth festival. The place was swarming with hippies—motorbikes, girl-friends, drugs, pornography, drunkenness, noise—it was all there. I looked at this mob and thought how one company of robust Russian infantry would drive it out of town.

Now many of these fellows would change their spots and prove very valiant people indeed if you appealed to them and presented to them a cause they thought was worth defending. But many of them would not be able to—many of them are too run-down by drugs and the other effects of a permissive physical life.

—Calls for social and, really, spiritual regeneration are never absent from your writings; and, personally, I find them difficult not to go along with. But such calls, while fully justified, tend to divert our attention from what we have to do right now in an unregenerate and ugly world, but the only world we have. Will Soviet power wait for our moral renewal?

KENNAN: The Russians are not in a good position to take advantage of our great weaknesses today. They have troubles of their own, enough to keep their attention riveted on other things (I need not rehearse what they are). So I don't think they will capitalise in the near future on the disturbing state of Western Europe. But let me remind you that Western Europe's troubles are not only of a moral and cultural character. One has also to take into account the state of Italy which is almost in-

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capable of governing itself; the disarray and uncertainty all over the Iberian Peninsula; the conflict between Greeks and Turks; and the approaching crisis in Yugoslavia with Tito's death. In the face of all these predicaments affecting the non-Soviet part of Europe, I wonder whether there isn't a certain misplacement of emphasis on the external dangers which are said to be threatening Western Europe.

—The net effect of what you are saying is: the United States is congenitally incapable of performing a consistently sustained world role; Western Europe, which is decadent and sunk in self-seeking materialism, is hardly worth defending. In any case, the external dangers are (you argue) probably imaginary, whereas the internal ones are real.

But let me assume two things. First, that the Soviet leaders mean what they say when they tell us that they have every intention to exploit the crises of Western society and to support, wherever they can, wars of "national liberation." Secondly, that Western society will, in the short run, not change significantly enough to introduce a fundamentally new element into the East-West relationship. If all this is true, doesn't your attitude amount to a kind of political quietism which would, in effect, mean handing a world hunting-licence to the Soviet Union?

KENNAN: I don't believe it does. The ideological approach of the Soviet Union is at least 70–80 years out of date and has very small appeal anywhere. Portugal has furnished an important lesson: it has shown that we have come a long way since 1917—we are not going to have a repetition of the October Revolution, we are not going to have a Bolshevik seizure of power in any of the West European countries. The extraordinary resistance put up by the Portuguese Socialists shows that even in a country as poor as Portugal and as lacking in democratic tradition, a totalitarian takeover can be, and was, effectively resisted.

It seems to me that the future of Western Europe lies along moderate socialism, and this socialisation of Western Europe harbours dangers for the Soviet Union: the example of the West European nations opting for a generally socialist line of development and detaching themselves from the United States will put great strain on the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe. The East European governments, particularly those straining for greater freedom from Soviet control, are going to say: "Why must *we* submit to this? Europe is no longer in a state of militant confrontation. Most of Western Europe is socialist. The United States is no longer there as a great imperialistic power. There is no more justification for the Soviet control of half of Europe. . . ." The disarray in Western Europe is bound to unleash disarray in Eastern Europe; it cuts both ways.

—It may or it may not. American power, or NATO *power, has not been able to stop the rot in Western Europe, whereas Soviet power has, brutally and repeatedly, stopped the disintegration of Eastern Europe and is, under the banner of proletarian internationalism, or some other slogan, certain to do so again, no matter how "socialist" Western Europe may become. In any case a significant loosening-up of Moscow's control of Eastern Europe does not at all appear to be an American priority.*

But to come back to your point: what you are implying is that the age of faith has come to an end both in the East and the West—on our side, a profound scepticism has destroyed our adherence to formal religions and undermined our trust in the values, tastes and sensibilities of what has traditionally been regarded as European culture. In the East, the appeal of Communism as an ideology is utterly exhausted. We are, then, talking of the clash of two secularisms, each groping for a new guiding principle.

KENNAN: We are talking about the disintegration of both militant faiths and strong ideological beliefs; but we are also talking about the disintegration of the old forms of great-power imperialism. I don't believe in the ability of the Russians to control Western Europe. They just would not know how. They are too crude and clumsy for any such exploits. Such indeed is their lack of sophistication that they have great difficulty in controlling even those parts of Europe which are under their hegemony.

By the same token, I don't believe in the ability of the United States to control any great part of the world. When people speak today of the Russians "getting" Angola, I don't know what they mean, any more than what they meant when they talked of our "losing" China. Nobody but the Angolans will make anything out of Angola—least of all the Russians with their multiple handicaps, especially in an African setting. No one can seriously believe that Angola will be turned into a Soviet republic on the Uzbekistan model. With the exception of Eritrea, the Russians have had nothing but serious reversals in their African policies. So it is up to us to grasp the nettle and tell the world that we are willing to leave such territories alone. We should come out firmly and frankly in the United Nations and say: "We are prepared to have nothing to do with this area. There will not be one penny of American money, not a single American rifle sent to Africa. The CIA will leave it totally alone on the assumption that the Soviet Union will do likewise. . . ." I think we could, with such a policy, put great pressure, through African opinion, on the Soviet leaders.

—I find your trust in the power of example most appealing, for it assumes the basic goodness and rationality of man; but I wonder whether there is room for this kind of sentiment in the hard world of

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international competition. Can you see professional revolutionaries of the stamp of Stalin, or Lenin, or even of the present conservative but expansionist hierarchy, being swayed by this kind of consideration? Their reaction would not be that the Americans have shown a noble example which they (the Russians) must follow, but rather that American capitalism has become so weak-kneed that they may safely push ahead wherever opportunity beckons.

I do, of course, realise that the idea of setting the world an example by our Western works rather than power, and the related notion of passive resistance, are basic to your approach to international affairs. They were there in your 1957 BBC Reith Lectures, where you said that in the event of a Soviet-American disengagement, European defence should be based on paramilitary forces on the Swiss territorial model:

> **"The training of such forces ought to be such as to prepare them not only to offer whatever overt resistance might be possible to a foreign invader but also to constitute the core of a civil resistance movement on any territory . . . overrun by the enemy. . . ."**

And on nuclear competition you said:

> **"Let us divest ourselves of this weapon altogether; let us stake our safety on God's grace and our own good consciences and on that measure of common sense and humanity which even our adversaries possess; but let us at least walk like men, with our heads up, so long as we are permitted to walk at all."**

Am I right in detecting a puritanical sense of guilt in all this—a feeling that America is too rich, too powerful, too vulgar, too brash, and eo ipso*: guilty? Guilty, above all, because it has not suffered where others have suffered, and has yet to be brought low before it can join the rest of mankind?*

KENNAN: Possibly, possibly. My main reason for advocating a gradual and qualified withdrawal from far-flung foreign involvements is that we have nothing to teach the world. We have to confess that we have not got the answers to the problems of human society in the modern age. Moreover, every society has specific qualities of its own that we in America do not understand very well; therefore I don't want to see us put in a position of taking responsibility for the affairs of people we do not comprehend. I would like to see us influence the world, if we can, by the power of our example to the extent that other people wish to follow it and find it applicable to themselves. But I have, as you know, always very emphatically rejected the concept of the universality of the American experience. Our national experience was never shared by any country and will never be shared by any country in the future. Never again will it be given to a national society to develop a vast, unpopulated area in the northern, temperate zone of the world. Think of the potential wealth of this continent, and the way in which people harnessed it to their needs, and also devastated, by their greed, its lakes and forests and sea-boards. All this wealth and space presented possibilities in America which have made the American outlook unique, and therefore inapplicable to any other society.

—It has fallen to the United States to lead the world, but the United States can offer no leadership. Isn't this, too, an almost unique fact in history?

KENNAN: Leadership cannot be given for the two reasons we have already mentioned: (*1*) because the United States has nothing much to say to the outside world, and (*2*) because the kind of government we have does not permit, even if we *had* a valid message to impart, the shaping of that message into a consistently pursued foreign policy.

I had the experience some years ago of making a call on one of the African leaders who shall be nameless. The meeting was arranged by some of my friends—I wasn't myself very anxious that it should take place.

"I appreciate your receiving me", I said to this African leader, "but I am embarrassed; my friends asked me to call on you, yet I have nothing to say to you and I don't think my country should either."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I hesitate to say anything, partly because I think we have no answer to your problem, and partly because I feel anything said would be misinterpreted—that is the atmosphere growing up around us." However, he pressed me to say something. "What do you think the United States ought to do with regard to us?", I was asked.

"Leave you absolutely and strictly alone", I said. "If I had anything to do with it, you would have no cause to complain that the United States took any interest in you except at your own insistent request. Other than that we would leave you absolutely in peace."

He threw back his head and laughed: "You can't do that—you are caught here—you can't opt out."

But I don't think we are necessarily caught in Africa, or anywhere else for that matter. We should, for a start, proceed roughly like this: if people from the developing world came to us with requests saying "We want this or that from you by way of help or advice", I would first ask them: "Why do you think we ought to give these things?" And if we did give them, I would say: "We want it to be firmly documented that these things were given at your request, your initiative, not ours." This would prevent a great many misunderstandings about American neo-colonialism, imperialism, etc. Incidentally, this is the way we ought to have behaved to De Gaulle in the years of his power.

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—I am not sure that your African leader's cry, "You are caught", is all that far-fetched. Raymond Aron remarks in his recent book on the American reluctance to bear the burdens of hegemony: "One cannot help wondering at times whether the American republic will ever attain maturity and whether it will at length realise that power implies rights and duties—limited rights and permanent duties."

In a sense I am more worried about your insistence that the United States has nothing to say to the world than by the nature of the American system which, as you say, inhibits the United States from putting across whatever it may have to say to the world. After all, the latter may *be open to reform, whereas the evaporation of American self-confidence is probably beyond repair in the foreseeable future.*

What I have more particularly in mind is something you have, I know, always roundly condemned: the idealistic, moralising streak in the American self-image and American foreign policy. While, in 1976, this may strike one as arrogant or unsophisticated, it has, in the past 150 years, certainly been one of the great assets of American foreign policy. The examples one could cite to support this assertion are so numerous, especially from Czarist Russia and Eastern and Southern Europe, where the promise of America was most widely appreciated, that I shall simply state the fact, wondering whether, if your policy of what one might call American "self-containment" were here to stay, the United States would not be depriving itself of its entire historic magnetism.

KENNAN: If the idealistic component in American policy *has* ever been a force in its own right, it has been confused and really nullified by the crimes and mistakes of recent years: by Viet Nam, by the stupidities of the CIA, by the violation of the democratic process as witnessed by Watergate, and so forth. It would take a long period of withdrawal, a quiet time of minding our own business and rethinking our national purpose, to persuade the world that we had, *if* we had, anything worth while to say to it.

3. *A New Political Elite?*

CAN WE TALK ABOUT *the type of government that would, in your opinion, do more justice to the requirements of the United States as a world power bearing world responsibilities than the present system? You have said that for a country as large and diverse as the United States, the chaotic processes of democratic compromise may well be the only way in which it can govern itself from a single capital. Nevertheless, it is clear from your writings that you have a preference (for philosophical as well as foreign-policy reasons) for a very different type of government—indeed for a different socio-political dispensation. A revealing clue to what you have in mind is, I think, to be found in* Democracy and the Student Left:

"Humanity divides . . . between those who, in their political philosophy, place the emphasis on order and those who place it on justice. I belong in the first of those categories. Human justice is always imperfect. The laws on which it bases itself are always to some extent unjust. These laws have therefore only a relative value; and it is only relative benefits that can be expected from the effort to improve them. But the good order of society is something tangible and solid. There is little that can be done about men's motives; but if men can be restrained in their behaviour, something is accomplished. To keep them from destroying each other physically on the streets; to commit them to the observance of a minimum of the amenities; to oblige them to observe greater outward decency than is really present in the primitive chaos of their souls—this is in itself an achievement. The benefit of the doubt should lie, therefore, with the forces of order, not with the world-improvers."

What we have here is a prescription for a hierarchical society—a benevolent aristocracy, no doubt of the spirit and intellectual attainment rather than of birth, or wealth, or political ambition. Is this the kind of road you would, in fact, like to see the United States follow?

KENNAN: Indeed, it is. I can see no reason why a popular control of government should be inconsistent with forceful and purposeful government if the institutions of government are properly designed. Many years ago I fell to thinking about the election of our Senators, and I recalled that initially they were meant to be appointed by the State governors, and I was thinking that would still be the best way to have them selected. I thought then, and I still think today, that we ought to create a panel, or pool of outstanding people that would comprise perhaps 500–1000 souls. Appointment to it would be by some detached and austere authority such as the Supreme Court, and membership in it would represent recognition of distinction in our national life achieved by a man's own efforts outside the field of political competition. One could then say to the electorate: "You can nominate people for election to the Senate—but only from among this body."

The greatest evil of the American democratic system lies, not in the process of election, but in that of nomination. I have nothing against people making their own decisions, but I do strongly object to the fact that our political parties confront the electorate time after time after time with a choice of deplorable mediocrities. We must find some way to restore what I am sure was the intention of the founding fathers, that is to say, make certain institutional arrangements whereby the people for high public office are selected from among the better men in our country, and not from among the vulgar, dull, sluggish and untutored. I am, of course (as you have yourself said), not talking here about an inherited aristocracy. I am talking of a "meritocracy" which we do have plentifully in this country, but are failing to use properly. I profoundly believe in the

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Burkeian view that only those are fit to exercise high office who hate it, and can only be persuaded to do it out of a sense of public duty. Such men, you might say, are not conspicuous by their large numbers in the United States today.

—Are they ever? Burke also said of his own time that the hour was great but the honourable gentlemen were small.

KENNAN: The only big man of the self-effacing sort I have known in our country was General George Marshall. He did not enjoy high office, he was a reluctant servant of the people, but he did serve with an iron sense of duty and integrity. George Washington was of the same disposition. We have come very far from the selfless dedication of the people who shaped the early history of the United States.

—Would I be wrong in suspecting that your ideal modern society might under certain conditions assume features less attractive than those of an intellectual aristocracy? You have yourself almost answered this question by posing it in the following way:

> **"Did it [the decline of liberal-democratic American institutions] mean that they . . . [the Communist leaders] were right and we—wrong? That modern man in the mass had to be thought of as a lost and blinded child who could be led out of his dangers and bewilderments only by bold, ruthless, self-confident minorities, armed with insights higher than any of which the masses were to be presumed capable?"**

KENNAN: This is of course the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Dostoevsky.

—Isn't this part of your search for the middle ground between the chaotic processes of American democracy, which you half-resent and half-admire, and the modern authoritarian state which you greatly resent but in some ways also admire? I am struck, for example, by your assessment of the domestic changes which were forced upon Czechoslovakia in the wake of Munich and the resignation of the Benes government in 1938:

> **"Few will wish the return of the many squabbling political parties, the petty bourgeois timidity, and the shallow materialism which seem to have characterised at least the lower organs of public administration under the former [Benes] régime. Czech nationalism will flourish indeed, but with it there will be a demand for greater personal responsibility and greater spiritual authority. . . ."**

When I look at your use of words such as "squabbling political parties . . . shallow materialism . . . bourgeois timidity . . . spiritual authority", I would say that there is, over a period of almost forty years, a remarkable consistency in your political philosophy.

KENNAN: If I *had* to give an answer to your question about the middle ground—and this is, I must admit, the hardest question I can think of in the whole spectrum of problems facing us—I would say that democracy is a distinctly preferable form of government in a small political community, or one which has a widely shared cultural heritage. I envy the Norwegian government the fact that Norway's population is a mere four million, that most of the country's political life takes place in the same capital, and one might almost say in or around the same boulevard which connects the Norwegian Parliament building with the Royal Palace.

—I remember a very hasty lunch recently with a Norwegian member of parliament. He apologised that he had to rush back to the House because the King was off skiing at 4.00 p.m., and members had promised to let him have some bill or other by 3.00 p.m. for the royal assent.

KENNAN: Yes—even in England you have a feel of cohesion and homogeneity. In London, influential people in different walks of life have always had a certain intimacy which assured communication even if it didn't assure anything else.

The point seems worth making that the capability for effective self-government seems to me to be pretty well restricted to countries that satisfy one of two requirements: small size and cultural cohesion, and particularly, for some reason, to those that border on the English Channel and the North Sea or have taken their origins from these coastal states. I do not claim this to be a form of superiority; you may say that these Northern nations have been more fortunate in some ways than their Southern neighbours. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that democracy is not widespread or successful beyond this northern tier of Europe. I can see people in Scotland, Hamburg, or Scandinavia enjoying good self-government; I can see a small New England community doing equally well. But I can't see the same thing happening in the Soviet Union, in Latin Europe or in any of the African countries. The taste (what the French call *gout*) for democracy is geographically and historically limited. I don't want to be misunderstood here. I don't reject democracy, for it is the most civilised form of government if the conditions are right; but I question its successful application to countries of the size of the United States, for example, where both scale and cultural heterogeneity militate against democracy being fully effective on a national level.

Democracy on the American scale can, as I have already said, only work through an endless chain of compromises; and I doubt whether these compromises, and the chain of lowest common denominators which they entail, can do justice to the needs of this country. Also, we shall have to come to grips with the ecological cluster of problems. These contain no popular materials for electioneering purposes. In fact, any political

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party that did, out of a sense of public duty, pin them to its banner would be courting certain disaster, for it would have to ask for a high sense of self-discipline and self-sacrifice to avert certain catastrophes which are not visible to the naked eye. I can see no political party mustering sufficient integrity to do this. For example, it may well be that we shall have to throttle our agriculture back to a point where we don't use great amounts of chemical fertilisers. Well, it would take bayonets to force the farmers to accept this. But in many other areas, too, there will be an incontrovertible need to impose an absolutely merciless discipline; and I can't see that being happily enforced through democratic means in a country as large and as polycentric as the United States.

—So your self-confident minorities, armed with insights higher than those of which the masses are capable, should be on their way back?

KENNAN: This may well be necessary—at the very least we have to work for a minority which has enough confidence in itself to act boldly and lead, rather than follow, public opinion. God knows, I don't want to see any dictatorship set up in this country, and I would not want to be part of one if it were. What I would like to see in the United States is a third party, a minority party, which would, if necessary, remain a minority party for a long time to come—an ideological party which would conduct itself by a high sense of discipline and take immense pains to elaborate an intellectually rigorous programme for the long-term future of the United States. Neither of our two political parties is going to do this; and I don't think any party which puts top priority on getting itself into office by the electoral process rather than on its function as an educational force in our society is going to do it. The moment you say that the most important thing is to win the next election, and if this means talking a lot of nonsense, indulging in a lot of hypocrisy and over-simplification, and taking enormous liberties with the truth, so be it—the moment you say that, you have ruled yourself out as a force to which the solution of our real problems could be safely entrusted.

Let me repeat that the first requirement is a system of selection of an élite which is not based on false values, which really does recognise merit both of the intellect and of character and responsibility. The people who have these qualities have to be encouraged and brought to a point where they can be seen and recognised, and then given responsibility. I don't think they should be given it indefinitely—one must have an occasional appeal to the public for a vote of confidence.

Moreover, we could do much better than we are doing in the United States if we allowed a lot of our political life to devolve to the regional centres instead of trying to run it all from here in Washington. Look at these monstrosities of buildings that are being constructed in Washington for an ever—spawning bureaucracy! This is a ghost city after 6.00 p.m. It is not safe to take a walk at night half-a-mile from the White House. An incredible situation! I can't understand the indifference of anyone in high positions in our government. Does the President not mind? It is right on his doorstep.

—Isn't your plea for the acceptance of an intellectual aristocracy a very difficult one in a basically egalitarian society? It was Michael Young who pointed out that, whereas in a traditional social milieu a man's misfortunes can always be attributed to social injustice ("I am as good a man as he is, but he was born rich/privileged" etc.), in a Meritocracy, where social status and money rewards are directly related to attainment, the consolation that you are where you are because fate put you there falls away; you are forced to face up to the fact that you are in an inferior position because you are *inferior. This means that Meritocracy increases, rather than decreases, the sense of injustice from which all who do not belong to the Meritocracy are bound to suffer. And that, after all, is the vast majority.*

KENNAN: Surely, one should be content with a modest station in life if one has modest capabilities.

—But is anyone so in the United States in the 1970s?

KENNAN: Some people are, and I don't think it is asking for too much. Remember the remarkable results which have been achieved over the centuries by organisations which apply these principles within themselves, as for example the Jesuit order. The same is true in a somewhat different sense of certain military bodies such as the Marine Corps. Both have produced remarkable qualities of leadership.

I would rather occupy a modest place in a good hierarchy than be a member of a grey, monotonous mass of mediocrity. There is a place for hierarchy and ceremony in life. Shakespeare was profoundly right when he said "All the world's a stage"—we all need theatre, and hierarchy *is* theatre in the sense that the people on the stage are in most cases not worthy of the places they occupy but have to pretend that they are. This is true of every college procession: there is not really all that much ascendancy among dons, and all that much lack of virtue among the rest, but people need and enjoy the spectacle.

A great impression was made on me many years ago by an illustration in Lewis Mumford's fine book, *The Culture of Cities*. He reproduced a picture of a holy procession in medieval

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Florence, and he pointed out that there were no spectators in the streets—everybody in town was in the procession, everybody fitted in somewhere. This is my thought of how life should be, and let us not take it too seriously that some senile old boy is at the head of the procession; that is part of life, too.

4. A Diplomatic Life

HOW IS IT THAT *your sense of "hierarchy" seldom prevented you from offering lively opposition to the official wisdoms of the State Department and other agencies of the American government? In fact one of my readings of the psychology of your record as a foreign service officer may be summed up as: profound scepticism—not with regard to policy* A *or policy* B, *but to the policies of authority as such. But, of course, I may be entirely wrong; it may well be that you were simply reluctant to go along with the policies of Washington because you felt that these were the work of lesser men, judging profound issues on frivolous, self-serving, or irrelevant grounds, and speaking almost always from inadequate knowledge. In any case, your opposition is almost always there.*

For example, just after the end of the War, when official American policy was still one of cautious trust, and unofficial American opinion one of friendship, towards the Soviet Union, yours was the first important voice to dispel American illusions and warn against "acting chummy" with the Russians (and I have already quoted the details of your warning from your Winter 1946 despatch).

Then, at the height of the Cold War, you challenged the orthodoxy of Washington from the opposite angle, telling it, with many qualifications and great subtlety, why Stalin had ample reason to feel threatened by NATO, *the Marshall Plan, the remilitarisation of Western Germany, American action in Korea, and the failure of the United States to leave Japan unoccupied and demilitarised. You wrote in 1952*:

"Both the imposition of the Berlin blockade and the Soviet crackdown in Czechoslovakia were reactions to these reverses for Moscow in the Cold War."

KENNAN: Let me, for the moment, take this question on a different ground. You must bear in mind that I voiced the sentiments you have mentioned, not to the governments to which I was accredited, but in communication with my own government. I fully subordinated myself to the policies of my government because I always believed that a diplomatic representative's duty is precisely to try, as best he can, to speak for his government. The way in which his own personality can be inserted in this act of representation is the manner in which he speaks, but he must not change the message. On the other hand, I also believe very firmly that it is essential for the diplomatic representative to be able to tell his government if he feels that some aspect of his government's policy in respect of the country in which he is stationed is wrong, to give his government guidance, and to help it to adopt a policy that would be more effective. The great difficulty is that often a piece of policy that commends itself as being likely to be effective in relation to a foreign government is in conflict with the domestic realities at home, and only the Secretary of State or indeed the President can resolve the dilemma.

As a rule of thumb, I would say the diplomatic representative should put up with a great deal of disagreement between himself and his government, and go on loyally to state his government's views to the foreign government, because that is, after all, the only thing that is useful to the foreign government. A foreign government is not much aided by knowing what you think personally; it wants to know what your government thinks and what it is prepared to do—and that you have to tell it. And even if you are, as a diplomatic representative, in very great disagreement with your government's policy, you ought not to leave your post in too great a hurry, for you are thereby forfeiting all the good that you could do by remaining with the problem, and the post which you occupy, for a further period. I have learnt this from my own experience. I was too quick to leave government service. I was too impulsive. I did not have sufficient patience; I should have had more. Some of my colleagues—very good men—rode out successfully a number of storms with our government, worse storms than the ones I had to face. I am thinking, for example, of my late colleague Tommy Thompson [US Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson] who was serving in Moscow at the time of the U-2 episode. It must have filled him (I know it did fill him) with a sense of utter despair to have American-Soviet relations so badly damaged by a perfectly silly and unnecessary operation of this kind. Every diplomat has his conflicts with authority. Most of them are, at one time or another, wringing their hands about the instructions they receive from home.

—But you have done a remarkable thing by subtly trying to educate the State Department and the President. Your despatches are surely the most instructive, and the best written, diplomatic literature of modern times, and their prescience is in most cases truly astonishing. I would have thought this was not exactly the kind of article which the run-of-the-mill American foreign service officer was expected, or able, to supply. Were you breaking fresh ground?

KENNAN: I think I was. I always liked writing. One of my great disappointments while I was in the foreign service—at a time, therefore, when the

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government were my only readers—was that my audience never noticed that some of these despatches were fair bits of prose.

—But here, generally speaking, you are in good company. Dylan Thomas, I remember, was refused a BBC job because the broadcasting bureaucracy opined that he did not write good enough English.

KENNAN: That, of course, is comforting! I wrote a great many diplomatic reports, long and short, under my own name as well as those of my superiors before I was appointed ambassador; and I always took a lot of trouble over them. Yet I did not have a single comment from anyone in government. That tells you something. My State Department readers seemed incapable of distinguishing one kind of prose from another. This was, I must say, a source of intense frustration for me because I did feel that, even if one could not expect style to merit praise in a bureaucratic environment, some of these missives of mine were at least valuable as documents and ought to have elicited some response.

—Fortunately, the record has, in the meantime, been set straight by history. For example, your despatches from Czechoslovakia at the time of, and after, Munich, have now been published as a book which has won wide acclaim.

KENNAN: Well, I did what I could to educate the Washington establishment, but I don't think I was at all successful except where the seeds happened to fall on ripe soil as in the case of [former Under-Secretary of Defense] James Forrestal. When I said things he wanted to hear, he was pleased. Otherwise I don't think my despatches affected anybody. Dean Acheson was amused and horrified by some of the things I wrote. My views on Russia were fairly widely circulated inside the government, but others got no internal publicity at all. After one of my visits to Latin America I wrote a despatch (it is mentioned in the first volume of my *Memoirs*) which so shocked the Secretary of State that he had all copies locked up, and the thing was never distributed.

—What was it that so shocked the mandarins?

KENNAN: I have never been told. But looking back on my report I suppose my whole analysis of the condition of man and civilisation in Latin America was too paradoxical, too philosophical and perhaps too academic for those vast, slumbering archives in the State Department. Here is the kind of thing I was saying:

> **"... to plunge deeply into it [Latin America] ... is to lose oneself in a sort of Alice's Wonderland, where normal relations between cause and effect have lost their validity, where nothing may be judged on its actual merits, where no idea has more than a relative integrity, where real things receive recognition only by their relation to the diseased and swollen human ego, where nothing is ever wholly finished because things are never more than symbols and there is no end to those things which are the objects of symbols.**
>
> **Here, for the sensitive foreigner, there are only three forms of escape: cynicism, participation, or acute unhappiness. Most foreign representatives find refuge in a combination of all three. ..."**

This was the kind of stuff that must have rendered my report intolerable to the embrace of the files in Washington.

—But, then, I can quite see that in a political culture in which one recent President earned the reputation of "never reading anything he could possibly avoid reading", your sketch of the human condition south of the United States border must have caused some bewilderment. Regular guys surely don't write that kind of stuff. Alternatively, I would say, if I were to be cynical, that some of your superiors in the State Department might have felt that your description of conditions in Latin America ("where no idea has more than a relative integrity" etc.) sounded a little too much like a description of things in the State Department, and that your report was put on ice for that reason. I suppose we shall never know.

Your outspokenness reminds me, by way of contrast, of your own observation that one of the reasons for the warped judgments of the Kremlin, under Stalin, in matters of foreign policy was the fear of Soviet ambassadors to report things as they saw them. They filed instead what Stalin and others wanted to hear. If your own example is anything to go by, any warped judgments from which the United States government might have suffered in the recent past could certainly not be excused by any lack of frank and perceptive reporting by American diplomatic representatives.

KENNAN: Ah, but my case is not typical. There is, on our side too, a form of diplomatic reporting which simply says "How true, Sir!" to the President or Prime Minister. This is an ever-present danger in every government—and it doesn't matter whether the government is a democratic one or not. There is a very real difficulty in going to a head of state or government—a man of great power—and trying to tell things to him which he does not want to hear. The extreme example of this was, of course, Hitler; and one of the remarkable things about Hitler, which has not been given sufficient attention in Western opinion about this man, is that there is to my knowledge no example of anyone ever succeeding in going to Hitler to tell him the truth about where he was leading Germany. Many men went to see him with this in mind, saying: "I'm going to tell him—somebody has to put it to him what he is doing to this country and the world. ..." But not one of them could bring it over his lips when he was in the presence of Hitler. And any of us who ever had to deal with world leaders realises how

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difficult this is. It wasn't easy to get through to Churchill or to Roosevelt. Both men charmed you out of the room before you could say anything to them; they were more interested in speaking than they were in listening.

—Was this your experience of John F. Kennedy too?

KENNAN: No, Kennedy was unusual in that he was an excellent listener. With foreign statesmen, too, he would sit down in his armchair and put his visitor in a chair right next to him and ask very relevant questions and listen with great respect and patience. He had a captivating boyish gallantry towards older men like myself, which I found very agreeable.

—You wrote Kennedy a very strong letter of support, one month before the President's assassination, "full of admiration, both as a historian and as a person with diplomatic experience, for the manner in which you have addressed yourself to the problems of foreign policy with which I am familiar." And Kennedy's handwritten reply was equally warm. The admiration was mutual and, I think, on Kennedy's part too, entirely genuine.

KENNAN: Probably so, but when the chips were down, this did not prevent him from serving me up on a platter to Wilbur Mills over cancelling the extension of most-favoured-nation treatment of Yugoslavia, to which I was then serving as Ambassador. But, looking back on the incident, which led to my resignation, I cannot blame him for this. Kennedy operated within the constraints of a tight political atmosphere, and I am sure he had very little choice. In a second term of office he might have acted differently.

—What about Harry Truman?

KENNAN: I had to go and see him on a number of occasions, and I found him a most congenial man—a man obviously capable of strong friendships. I was glad that I did not know him better than I did because I had a feeling he was the sort of man who, if you were his friend, would expect you to be the friend of all his friends and the enemy of all his enemies; and I didn't want to be either. Truman was a healthy spirit; he was not as forbidding as some of these other great political leaders, not as difficult to get through to. You could not help liking him—here was an absolutely sane, normal person who was himself most of the time. He did not put on airs—he was like Ernie Bevin: an excellent man of the people.

—Hence his current great popularity in the wake of Viet Nam and Watergate—a "straight guy" after the card-sharpers and the intellectuals.

KENNAN: Yes, but his apotheosis is not complete. The revisionist historians have to condemn him because, after all, the Potsdam Conference took place under Truman's presidency and so did the development of nuclear weapons. Therefore, in the eyes of these historians, and a lot of the student youth, Truman remains a villain.

—Nevertheless, the new Truman cult is shared by most Americans I have met.

KENNAN: It is. We are, you know, so terribly happy in this country when we get one good man of the people! Lincoln was that, and Truman is in a way in the Lincolnesque tradition. He embodied all the virtues of the Midwest. Even his violent reaction to the criticism of his daughter Margaret was well taken. Everybody understood this. People said: "Well, he is a father, and he must be loyal to his daughter. . . ."

Truman was a man of intense loyalties to a lot of very shabby friends. This was something with which the average man in the United States could identify, because the average chap would think: "Most of my friends are shabby people too, but I am loyal to them, and I admire Harry for being the same . . . ."

But coming back to the phenomenon of inability to get through to a person in high office—this was also true of Stalin. We know from Khrushchev and many other sources that people were too terrified when they spoke to him to say anything he did not want to know. But he was a great dissembler, and therefore a patient listener, when he wanted for any reason to create the impression that he was listening.

—Why did you never go to see him? You say in your Memoirs *that you hesitated for a time, that you pondered the matter over long walks in Moscow, but finally decided that you had nothing to say to the man. I am a little puzzled. I would have thought that even to hear Stalin's lies and evasions would have seeded in your mind impressions of some importance which, in turn, would undoubtedly have added to the knowledge of your government. I remember Arnold Toynbee telling me how his visit to Hitler in 1936 left him with the indelible impression that Hitler was already preparing for a showdown with Russia.*[1]

KENNAN: I had nothing to say to Stalin on behalf of the United States government. Nor did I have (and this again reflects on our system) instructions which would have given me any idea what to say to him. I felt that my own views were such that it would have taken me a very long time to get them across, and clearly an audience with Stalin was not going to be the right occasion. In addition to that, I knew that my British colleague, [Sir Alvery] Gascoigne, had been kept waiting for an appointment, unsuccessfully, for seven or eight months; and I did not want to subject myself, and

[1] The visit is reported in Arnold Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, 1967.

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the United States government, to this humiliation. In retrospect, I may have made a mistake, although I had no instructions to see Stalin. But certainly there must have been raised eyebrows in Washington: "Why in the world did you not seek an interview? What did you expect to achieve by not seeing Stalin?"

—Stalin may, of course, very well have treated you the way he treated Gascoigne, for he had, as you later discovered, a profound grudge against you which he took care not to forget. I have in mind the incident of your short speech in Moscow on "Victory in Europe Day" in 1945.

KENNAN: Stalin wasn't accustomed to anyone else in the Soviet Union, Russian or foreign, being the subject of an approving demonstration by a Soviet crowd; and I am sure this had a lot to do with my expulsion, seven years later, as United States Ambassador. I am saying this because the *Pravda* editorial commenting on my expulsion—and this was a first-page article written with the highest authority—brought up a distorted version of what had occurred on "VE-Day" in 1945. Clearly, I had offended Stalin.

—But the ostensible reason for your expulsion was a statement you had made at the Tempelhof airport in West Berlin telling the assembled journalists how foreign diplomats lived in Moscow:

> **"I was interned here in Germany for several months during the last war. The treatment we receive in Moscow is just about like the treatment we internees received then, except that in Moscow we are at liberty to go out and walk the streets under guard."**

KENNAN: Yes, these remarks of mine were given by the Soviet government as their reason for considering me *persona non grata*; but I know it for a fact that the real reason was the earlier episode which had stuck in Stalin's gullet. The decision to expel me was Stalin's—the Soviet Foreign Ministry was not even consulted and knew nothing about it until they heard that the decision had been taken.

—What did you say on "VE-Day" that so upset Stalin?

KENNAN: Oh, nothing you might consider remotely objectionable. On the morning of "VE-Day" a large crowd of enthusiastic Russians gathered, I think entirely spontaneously, in front of our Embassy to celebrate the end of the War and Allied cooperation. I got up on a column in front of the Embassy building and said, in Russian: "Congratulations on the day of common victory. All success to our Soviet allies"—something of this sort. But these remarks were developed by Moscow's ugly propaganda machine into a wholly distorted story based on what Ralph Parker, a former Prague correspondent for both the *New York Times* and the London *Times*, said about the incident in a book published four years later: *The Conspiracy against Peace*. Parker (who was a man far to the Left) and his Russian-born wife had phoned that day and asked whether they could come up to our flat and watch the "VE-Day" celebrations from our balcony. I said: "By all means, if you can get through the crowds into the building, why, come on up." (We happened to have an apartment on the fifth floor, the floor with the balconies, so one could have a very good view of this great scene from there.) Well, Parker and his wife came up—Mrs Kennan and I had soon to leave because Mrs Churchill was in town and we were going to a reception to honour her. "Make yourselves at home", I said to the Parkers, "and go out and look to your heart's content." Well, Parker went out on the balcony for a couple of minutes and came back into the room. My recollection is that we were just putting on our coats and hats when Parker said: "Isn't this a marvellous occasion?!"

"Yes", I replied, "but it also makes me a little sad."

"Why does it make you sad?" he asked.

"Because there is something pathetic in the hopes that these people attach to the end of the War. There are going to be many problems after the War. These people have been through so much suffering that they think victory is going to remove all their troubles. Russia is facing major problems of reconstruction; it will be a long period before material conditions can get better. . . ."

As I say, four years later Ralph Parker published a propaganda book in which he recounted a version of this episode. By then Parker had become an obvious tool of Stalinist propaganda and had burned his bridges to the West. What Parker now said was, very briefly, that he had come up to my apartment to watch the passers-by (he did not say it was a big demonstration), that he had gone out to the balcony, then come back into the room to find me cowering out of sight of the crowd and gnashing my teeth, saying: "Ha!—they triumph, but little do they know that the real war is about to begin!"

Parker was, by that time, entirely under Soviet control. His book was a vile and mendacious attack on the United States government and especially on its Embassy in Moscow. It was entirely built around this episode.

5. Towards a more Rigorous Discipline

HAVING ALREADY TOUCHED ON *the uneasy co-existence in your career of the historian and the man of action, may I broaden the questioning a little*

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to see how the consciousness of history (or, as the case may be, its absence) affects American national behaviour? It has been said that the greatness of America is due to the fact that it has been able "to shed the heritage of European history"; or, conversely, that America's recent disasters in Indochina and elsewhere have been due to her "neglect of the lessons of history."

There is certainly a lot to be said for the first proposition, for the whole raison d'être *of the United States was escape from the iniquities and poverty of Europe. America exists as a protest against the burdens of the past. Hence the neglect of history in American education, the emphasis on "political science" as surrogate history, and hence also the historical amnesia of the American people which may or may not be a good thing for the future of Western civilisation.*

KENNAN: You are right about the dangers of historical amnesia. Yet the evidence is contradictory. Look at the cult of books about the Civil War, look at the present bicentenary—there is a great interest in American history and an absolute plethora of doctoral dissertations about obscure and less obscure personalities in American history. This would show that there is a historical consciousness of a kind in the United States.

—But isn't this a mere search for roots and identity—a form of history, but perhaps a rather low form?

KENNAN: I suppose it is a form of genealogy. History in relation to the rest of the world has fallen on evil days in so far as American popular culture is concerned.

A great deal of good academic history is being written, and in Russian studies the American effort is outstanding. Some of the younger scholars at American universities are writing the best books that are being produced anywhere in the world on Soviet history—objective, informed, and excellent in all respects. It is unjust to cite names because there are so many good people active in the field; but let me just mention Stephen Cohen's study of Bukharin[2] as one example of superlative scholarship. So academic history of a specialised kind is by no means neglected. On the contrary, recent history and diplomatic history are more intensively cultivated here than on the Continent and, I would say, on a par with Britain which has its own distinguished tradition in recent and diplomatic historiography.

—The American contribution to academic historiography is well recognised, but isn't it rather something like the American contribution to astrophysics or biochemistry, with no escalator between the man in the street and the ivory tower? Can we expect the study of history—conceived as the study of human affairs par excellence*—to penetrate the consciousness of a country that consists (the current bicentenary notwithstanding) overwhelmingly of "neophiliacs"?*

KENNAN: There is no adequate communication between the history that is being written at the universities and American popular culture, and particularly the culture that finds its way into the press, radio, and television. Every day I am struck and horrified by the absence of almost any historical memory in the writings and personal attitudes of American editors and journalists. This morning, for example, there are great headlines in the papers about something Dr Kissinger said or did in the matter of Angola, as though this were the first time that a problem of this nature had ever come up. Where have these people been for the last thirty years? There have been scores of similar instances since 1945.

There are two kinds of historical memory. There is what one might call the emotional-political memory that you will find, for example, among the Irish, the Southerners in the United States, and in Yugoslavia where the ancient sufferings of the Serbs and Montenegrins, the battles they fought with the Turks, and so on, are firmly engraved in the popular mind. This kind of history sustains a spirit of self-adulation, intolerance, and chauvinism.

But history proper (I will not call it objective history, for we don't quite know what that is)[3] is a different thing; and you are quite right in saying that what is missing in the United States is any sense of the lessons and wisdom of history, especially what history has to reveal about human beings themselves in the political, cultural, economic context; how individuals and governments act and react; and how the judgments of both must be set against relative standards. For example, there is, in our historical consciousness, no comprehension of the fact that every democracy bears in it certain elements of conspiracy, and every totalitarian régime carries a certain sense of responsibility to the people. These distinctions are relative; but reading the things that are being written in our country you would never realise that they are.

—I happened to glance through, the other day, the minutes of a Pacem in Terris *conference, (held in 1965) on coexistence and the problem of how far Communist parties ought to be recognised as ordinary parliamentary forces in Western society. You were yourself one of the participants; Arnold Toynbee was also there, and he made an interesting point by taking an analogy from 16th-century Japan. "Look what happened to the Spanish Jesuit missionaries", he said (and I am summarising Toynbee) . . . they arrived in Japan in the second half of the 16th century and were rapidly making*

[2] See, in ENCOUNTER, Sidney Hook's long review-article, "The Case of Comrade Bukharin" (December 1974).

[3] See: George F. Kennan, "History as Literature", ENCOUNTER (April 1959).

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converts to Christianity. But the Japanese wouldn't have that. They took some pretty drastic action: they made it illegal, under pain of death, to be a Christian; every Japanese family had to register with a Buddhist monastery to prove it was Buddhist and not Christian, and the Japanese forbade foreigners to come to Japan under pain of death. But none of this was done solely because the Jesuits were propagating an alien faith; it was done, rather, because they were suspected of being fifth-column agents of a large, proselytising political power—Spain. However, the Japanese did allow in the Dutch Protestant missionaries who were treated very differently. For one thing the Japanese did not take these missionaries' work too seriously because they thought Protestants were, after all, not really Christian! For another, and more important, they did not feel that these Dutch pastors were agents of a militant ideological power. So the Dutch were sent off to a small island where they were allowed to work, but once a year they were summoned to Kyoto and made to trample on the cross to confirm their heterodoxy in the presence of a jeering Japanese audience. . . ." And Toynbee seemed to conclude from all this that in our society, too, the "protestant" type of communism, if there was no militant secular power behind it, ought to be tolerated because missionary work is one of the natural human rights. But in retrospect, he said, the Japanese had some justification for their action because Japan was not conquered by any Western power, whereas the Philippines, next door, **were** *conquered.*

What an impressive historical panorama, I thought to myself as I read Toynbee's remarks, and how very remote from American thinking! Would a connection of this sort, between the legitimacy and eligibility of the West European Communist parties in the 1960s, and the fortunes of Spanish Jesuit missionaries back in 16th-century Japan, make sense to an American audience? Yet is this not precisely the kind of perspective which the study of history ought to encourage?

KENNAN: It ought, and this is where the teaching of history in American education is gravely at fault. The deficiency applies, of course, as much to the study of Greek and Latin as it does to history; for all these disciplines provide a mirror in which we can, through a variety of civilisations and linguistic cultures, look at ourselves. Truth in human affairs reveals itself only very rarely by some linear process. It cannot be stated in pure form—it is brought out dialectically, that is to say, by comparison, and if you haven't the historical depth, you can't make the comparison.

We are, needless to say, much better off than the Russians, because in this country history can at least be freely studied and written; but there is a great failure to communicate it—a failure which reflects on the whole American educational system, and it is one of the reasons for my great pessimism about the United States at the present time. I have, in my own lifetime, witnessed a steep decline in educational standards. It is deplorable that so much of primary education has been taken over by professional educators who have been trained to believe that teaching is a technique unrelated to the subject, rather than the manifestation of enthusiasm for a subject. We have also made cardinal mistakes under the heading of the "democratisation of education." The equalisers and popular educationists are profoundly in error. A nation must not sacrifice the advance of its talented élite, and I'm afraid we are in danger of doing that.

I am, for the same reasons, against "open admission" to university. Something may possibly be said for open admission to the big State universities which are, by and large, social rather than educational institutions. At a time of unemployment, they are an especially convenient way of keeping millions of young men and women out of the labour market.

But most of these universities should not be regarded too seriously from the standpoint of higher education. Those students at the State universities who are susceptible of being led on to the higher reaches of the work of the mind should be taken away from these institutions and put in others, where sterner demands and sterner intellectual discipline would be placed upon them. This was the old, monastic concept of the European university, and I should like to see it revived in America.

—*You quote (in* Democracy and the Student Left*) Woodrow Wilson's evocation of the university as the kind of institution America has rejected but you would like to see established. It is a revealing passage:*

> **". . . a free place . . . where no man could be and not know with how great a destiny knowledge had come into the world—itself a little world; but not perplexed, living with a singleness of aim not known without; the home of sagacious men, hardheaded and with a will to know, debaters of the world's questions every day and used to the rough ways of democracy; and yet a place removed—calm Science seated there, recluse, ascetic, like a nun; not knowing that the world passes, not caring, if the truth but come in answer to her prayer. . . . A place where to hear the truth about the past and hold debate about the affairs of the present, with knowledge and without passion; like the world in having all men's life at heart, a place for men and all that concerns them; but unlike the world in its self-possession, its thorough way of talk, its care to know more than the moment brings to light; slow to take excitement, its air pure and wholesome with a breath of faith; every eye within it bright in the clear day and quick to look toward heaven for the confirmation of its hope. . . ."**

You then point to the "dreadful incongruity between this vision and the state of mind—and behaviour—of the radical left on the American campus."

The United States is no longer troubled by student disorders, yet Woodrow Wilson's vision of the university as a seat of high culture and seclusion seems to me as remote from America in the late 1970s as it was a decade ago. I don't suppose you would agree with that?

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KENNAN: No, I wouldn't. At the height of the student disorders I often asked my friends at Princeton and Harvard: Why can't you take a part of this university, say, the old Graduate College at Princeton, and say that this is going to be a special institution for those who are seriously interested in the humanities and can prove a serious competence in their field. No one has to come here who doesn't want to; but those who do elect to come must bear in mind that different rules prevail here. This is going to be an austere place of serious study. We will have no pre-arranged sporting activities. You can go out and take a walk or play tennis, but no football, no baseball, no mass-audiences. This is going to be a place of contemplation. Our terms will be short, as in England, but while you are here, no one, either faculty or students, will leave this place for weekends. You are going to remain here, and we will not have music played all over the campus, nor are you going to have high-fidelity equipment installed in your rooms. We will exclude television and all the other trivia of communication.

I would not insist that this be an all-male institution but I would have the sexes segregated. There would be no sleeping together in term time. All that would have to wait for the vacations. I would tell them: you are going to have two months' vacation; we don't care what you do then as long as you return in full possession of your faculties, as long as you have not undermined your intellectual make-up by drugs or alcohol. But while you are here, you are going to concentrate on what you are doing. You are going to live with these books. . . .

You may be right in saying that the general cultural trend in the United States is not towards this conception of the university; so be it. But there are enough good people in this country to make such a clearly élite institution a success. The intellectual endowment of the students at our leading universities is excellent—better than it was in my generation. What needs to be done is to create a cultural milieu of the kind Woodrow Wilson had in mind, so that the cutting edge of the intellect is given a spiritual dimension. The medieval, monastic idea of the university is not nonsensical. It recognises that the process of learning must, if it is to be fruitful, be associated with a certain remoteness from the contemporary scene, a certain renunciation of participation in the interests of the achievement of a better perspective later in life. It is, as I said in my book on the student rebellion, an ideal that does not predicate total conflict between thought and action, but recognises that there is a time for each.

One other thing: We must, at the university, too, get away from the so-called professional approach to higher education. I would only admit students to my élite university on condition that they had no such "professionalism" in mind. I would select people who wanted to be well-read in the round, with a refined and disinterested curiosity about life—and let the rest come later. It is a great pity that the idea of a liberal education is dying out and that the students are so professionally dedicated. They don't seem to have that pristine wonderment about life that befits their age and is the secret of any worthwhile achievement. It makes it very, very dull to deal with them.

6. Cold Warrior or Revisionist Historian?

YOU HAVE NOT QUITE *satisfied my curiosity whether the symbiosis in your writings of the "Cold Warrior" and the "Revisionist" historian (and I am using both labels,* faute de mieux, *with great reluctance) is sufficiently explained by a kind of sublimated gut-reaction on your part to the conventional wisdom of authority. I have mentioned, by way of an example, the incongruity which exists between your "long telegram" in the winter of 1946, and your 1952 despatch "The Soviet Union and the Atlantic Pact." Clearly, you did not suffer fools gladly, especially those set above you in the hierarchy; and I think it is fair to say that you were, by temperament, a "resigner." Do these factors tell us the whole story?*

KENNAN: No, they don't. I would not want you to think that the incongruity which you notice stems from some perverse obstructionism, or one-upmanship, on my part. Let me explain what the incongruity was about, and why each of the two, seemingly irreconcilable, strands of my argument was entirely justified in the context in which it was put forward.

Under the Roosevelt administration, both before the War and during the War, there was a wide measure—and for many of us who were serving in Moscow, a disturbing measure—of naïvety and shallowness in the judgments of our governmental leaders with regard to the Soviet Union. This, we felt, was a danger of great seriousness which we had to combat. Soviet-American relations could not be dealt with by those easy and really childish methods which commended themselves to FDR; that is to say, by one-sided American gestures which were expected to appeal to the Soviet leaders, and especially Stalin, personally. (I was shocked to discover that Roosevelt had at one point invited Stalin to involve himself in American domestic politics by sending Stalin a private request to dissuade the United States Communist Party from supporting him at the presidential election lest this support should prove embarrassing to him.)

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In the immediate post-War period, when I wrote my "long telegram", I was especially concerned to bring our people in Washington to understand that, before they could effectively deal with the Soviet leadership about the future of Europe or anything else, they would have to prove to it that we would not allow Moscow to win by methods of infiltration and concealed aggression —that the West had sufficient virility, sufficient firmness, and sufficient self-confidence to prevent itself being undone by those means. In the latter part of the War we had led Stalin to believe that Western Europe was being reduced to so pathetic a state in terms of military and economic power and self-confidence, and that the United States was motivated by such a sweeping naïvety with regard to Soviet power, that without any further military action at all, the Soviet Union could soon eliminate the United States from the whole Eurasian landmass and pretty much have it its own way throughout the world. It was clear to me that, so long as the Russians entertained such ideas, we had no hope of dealing with them effectively. Therefore, in 1945 and 1946, I urged Washington to stiffen up and disabuse Moscow of these illusions because I was convinced (and I said so in my despatches) that only when we had proven to the Russians that they could not get what they wanted without dealing with us, would they consent to deal with us.

The effort to enlighten the United States was almost more successful than I had supposed. (I do not, of course, credit myself personally with that success because American opinion was in the process of undergoing a profound change which had deeper reasons.) By the winter of 1947–48 the success of the exercise was amply demonstrated, and the psychological triumph of the Marshall Plan clinched that demonstration. It was my expectation—and I believe I can speak here for my late colleague, Chip Bohlen[4]—that once we arrived at that point, we would sit down with the Soviet leaders and talk to them about the future of Europe in order to see whether we couldn't get some agreement on a general withdrawal of their power and our power, but on terms which would make it possible for the rest of Europe to live.

At that point I found that I had, so to speak, oversold my bill of goods, that our people had become so persuaded of the hostility of the Soviet leaders that they would now wholly dismiss the idea of ever dealing with them about anything. We had many people here, of whom John Foster Dulles was one, who felt that the only way in which we could ever make headway against Moscow was to develop enormous military strength and get the Soviets to do what we wanted them to do by putting them under threats and pressure. And I am fairly sure that the nuclear weapon, the possibilities and impossibilities of which everyone misunderstood except Stalin, encouraged this line of thinking. Washington was obsessed by the idea that the Cold War had to be thought of in exclusively military terms.

I was appalled by all this. I saw no hope in it, and I did not believe that we should take part in any effort to overthrow the Soviet régime. First, I did not think such an attempt would be successful; and, second, even if it were successful, I did not think we had an alternative to offer. In case of a full-scale war, complete victory was all but impossible, whether nuclear weapons did or did not exist. I was shocked by the simplicity of thought which was overtaking people in this country: they were putting Stalin into the image of Hitler, thinking that the Soviet threat was the same kind of thing the Nazi threat had been. Of course, it wasn't at all, and I don't think I need go into arguing why.

We were in the middle of the Cold War. My whole thought (to repeat a point I want to stress) in pleading initially for a firm Western stance was to enable us eventually to talk to the Russians so effectively that we could get them to withdraw from the centre of Europe, for the Soviet presence there seemed to me catastrophic for the present and future of the entire continent. Well, I discovered to my horror (and I had the same experience with my Reith Lectures in 1957) that very few people in the Western world wanted to have the division of Europe removed. Most Western Europeans were still more afraid of Germany than they were of Russia, so that the division of Germany, with the United States holding the fort with its troops in Germany, suited them rather well.

This again was something I had to oppose—I never believed that the present division of Europe could be a lasting arrangement, and I stated my reasons for saying why it could not in my Reith Lectures; and even today, I can find very little to fault in them. One reason was the impossible situation of Berlin. But there was also a deeper reason, which few have consented to recognise down to this day: even if we do accept the division of Europe (as apparently we do) with very little concern, we cannot be sure that it will be at all times acceptable to the people of Eastern Europe. We have already had two extremely serious warnings, in the Hungarian revolution and the 1968 Czechoslovak events, to mention only two of the major upheavals—and, you know, one isn't often given more than two warnings in life.

[4] Former US Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen (Ambassador to the USSR from 1953–57, to the Philippines from 1957–59, and to France 1962–67), who was from 1960–63 Deputy Under-Secretary of State in the Kennedy administration.

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What are we going to do the next time there is trouble? What is our policy going to be if one of the East European countries does manage to free itself from Soviet tutelage? As things are, we won't have any policy for it—we won't have any place for it. To take it into NATO would be to make a military demonstration against Moscow, which Moscow can't accept.

—After your Reith Lectures, Raymond Aron said in a famous symposium[5] that Europe could put up with an absurd or even with an unjust situation, but it could not put up with an ambiguous situation. As (Aron said) the division of Europe was absolutely clear-cut and the absurdities were well respected, the division was acceptable. This is a stance which ignores the restiveness of the East European nations and tacitly assumes that if restiveness were to lead to renewed trouble, the Soviet divisions would act as they always have done, and the West would remain as inactive as it always has been.

I notice that Dr Kissinger, speaking with the voice of Helmut Sonnenfeldt, appears to have more complex thoughts about the division of Europe. He does recognise that the strained relationship between the peoples of Eastern Europe and Moscow is a great source of instability in Europe, and a greater danger to world peace than the conflict between East and West. He notes that the Kremlin has not been able to acquire any "organic" sense of loyalty in Eastern Europe, and that it relies, therefore, on the presence of sheer military power. He cautions against any excessive zeal on the part of the United States to jeopardise the chances of a more organic relationship between the East European nations and Russia; and he expresses the hope that East European aspirations for greater autonomy, which he supports, will be contained within the Soviet geopolitical context.

You have just asked: how would the West react if some of the East European countries tried to liberate themselves from Russian hegemony? What is the political context in which you would visualise such a liberation?

KENNAN: Look at what has already happened in Eastern Europe. The Yugoslavs have liberated themselves. The Finns, to whose plight the West Europeans love to compare themselves when they talk of "Finlandisation", have, if anything, moved from a restricted sense of sovereignty to a much fuller sense of sovereignty, rather than the other way round. At one time the Minister of the Interior was a Communist, and the police were also under Communist control; but that is no longer so. Today the Finns enjoy complete freedom in their internal affairs. Look at what the Rumanians have accomplished. They follow in many ways, though not in all ways, a highly independent line. Or take Hungary, where the 1956 revolution, although ostensibly a failure, actually changed the internal situation materially for the better, so much so that in a curious way Hungary is leading a substantially independent existence under the Communist dispensation.

All these features are producing a state of affairs in Eastern Europe which is very different from what we saw there in the late 1940s and 1950s. Not only that, but we don't know what the future may bring. We don't know what sort of an impact the forthcoming change in the Soviet leadership is going to have on the sensitive texture of East European politics. Of course, nothing at all may happen. The party may hold together, younger men may be brought in without friction or upheavals, and so on. But, on the other hand, the dénouement may be quite different. Things may occur which will suddenly confront Western Europe and the United States with the need to have something it has never had since before World War I, that is, a policy towards Eastern Europe, and a viable policy at that.

But these are not my only reasons for opposing the division of Europe. It is to me a tragedy that half of Europe is now constrained to live under a different intellectual and cultural discipline than the other half.

—So long as the system is not frontally provoked, Moscow's tactical permissiveness in Eastern Europe can go quite far. But as soon as it is thought that the system itself is challenged, Moscow clamps down with great severity. We saw this in 1956 and 1968. Today, the Rumanians have a certain licence because their dissent is limited to foreign policy. Internally they do not challenge the legitimacy of the Soviet model of society; in fact, they are taking trouble to endorse it. Hungary seems to be a borderline case. There, under protestations of external and internal orthodoxy, a good deal of economic and cultural liberalism is tolerated. But one would probably do well to think of it as no more than a court-jester's licence which stands to be revoked the moment it ceases to be a convenient way of relieving tension and begins to impinge on the system. (Whether, of course, the licence **could** *be revoked is another matter.)*

KENNAN: One thing that has been widely missed by people in judging events in Eastern Europe is the Russians' willingness to put up with a great deal in terms of internal change in these countries, even in a direction they might not approve of, provided it is done with a hammer from the top and without any suspicion of spontaneity from below. What they cannot tolerate, and I suppose this was one of the key elements in the Czechoslovak situation in 1968, is any form of spontaneous reform. They will, for example, permit the East Germans to put into effect economic reforms much more far-reaching than those which were

[5] *The West, the Atom, and Russia:* a Round-Table Discussion of the views of George F. Kennan (with Denis Healey, Richard Lowenthal, Joseph Alsop, Raymond Aron *et al.*), edited by Melvin J. Lasky (1958).

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envisaged by Dubcek, as long as it is done dictatorially—as long as the Party is seen to be fully in control.

—There is also the reluctance to see the client states acquire certain liberties and living standards which the Russians themselves cannot afford to have. If so, isn't Eastern Europe up against an immovable object? Won't East Germans, Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians, by virtue of their cultural seniority, always demand certain things which the Russians will not demand, much less achieve?

KENNAN: The whole concept of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe is unsound even from the Russian point of view. Moreover, the prospects of a continuing Soviet hegemony there are undermined by the gradual loss of Soviet leadership of the world communist movement: as the large West European Communist parties become independent from Moscow, the East European parties will have alternative poles of orientation. This could be very important.

For example, I am persuaded that the Yugoslav defection had a great deal to do with the fact that the Rumanians broke ranks on certain important aspects of Soviet foreign policy. Now if—and it appears not impossible—the Italian Communists came into a position of power, this would affect the parties in Eastern Europe even more forcefully. Given an ideological alternative, the East European Communists could claim a degree of freedom from Moscow without suggesting that they were "going over to the capitalists." They could argue: "We find this or that commendable in Chinese, or Italian, or French Communist ideas which we think we ought to be able to adopt. We are not departing from Marxism, and we are not joining the enemy. . . ."

Let me say a word at this juncture about the intellectual background of the growing respectability of West European Communism. Take the French Communist Party. For a number of years it has been a party of protest, and it has occupied that part of the spectrum in French politics which is normally occupied by a strong movement of protest. But if you look at French politics as a whole, I am struck there too (as I am when I look at other parts of Europe) by the sweeping power of Marxist ideas among the student youth and intellectuals. Even a newspaper like *Le Monde*—one of the world's best papers—is now profoundly socialistic in spirit, and not just moderately socialistic, because whenever there is an issue between Peking or Moscow and the West, it instinctively supports the Communist side. I find this quite appalling.

—Doesn't this show that intellectuals are no better, even if they are perhaps no worse, than other mortals? That they are desperately in need of a small number of simple certainties. . . .

KENNAN: . . . And they reach for the false ones if they cannot find genuine certainties.

—Marxism may be old-fashioned and irrelevant, but it has the soothing aura of faith, and that is what most intellectuals, and indeed most people, are really after. I suppose we are at heart all children grasping for father-images, and the worse the chaos around us, the simpler the images that attract us. That the decadence of our civilisation should coincide with the infantilism of our political culture—doesn't this have an awesome appropriateness about it?

KENNAN: I *can* explain the phenomenon, and yet I cannot really understand it. The naïvety of Marxism-Leninism, and its irrelevance to contemporary conditions, have been so *amply* demonstrated at every turn! And yet, here you have a great section of German, and French, and Italian student youth violently exercised in its favour. Of course, there may be reasons for desiring a greater measure of *dirigisme* in public affairs in the Western countries; I want it myself for ecological reasons rather than social ones—so that may have something to do with it. But I am still amazed at the shallowness of understanding that animates even people in *Le Monde*, and the double standards they so liberally apply. Any régime that chooses to call itself Marxist can be sure that its brutalities and oppression will be forgiven, whereas any régime that does not is stamped as being of the Right, in which case the slightest invasion of the rights or liberties of the individual on *its* territory at once becomes the object of intense indignation.

It is a minor blessing that, after Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Moscow has never recovered its prestige in the eyes of the West European Communists and thus ceased to be the automatic beneficiary of the radicalism of the West European student youth. In fact, there has been a tendency for latter-day Western Communists to associate themselves much more with anti-Western, nationalist, left-wing movements of the Third World than with Moscow. Apparently the criterion of their affections is the degree of hatred of a given external movement for the West, and especially for their own societies. I asked a Norwegian student recently what it was that the radical students at the University of Oslo most admired—what did they look up to as an example of a hopeful civilisation? After considerable brooding and thought-taking, he said it was . . . Albania!

Can one think of anything more miserable than the régime in Albania? Obviously there is not one shred of reality in this view—no interest at all in the objective truth about Albania. Albania is picked up simply because it seems to be a club

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with a particularly sharp nail at the end of it with which to beat one's own society, one's own traditions, one's own parents. This is a rebellion against Western Europe—it is not one in favour of anything much else.

7. The Two Disasters

TO COME BACK TO *the division of Europe: you were saying that the Finns have come to enjoy complete domestic independence. My recent visit to Finland leaves me wondering whether this is really so. The Finns have imposed on themselves, either under thinly-veiled pressure or the threat of pressure, certain self-denying ordinances of which self-censorship of the press is one—and perhaps the most harmful as well as the most spectacular.*

KENNAN: The Finns have put certain restraints on themselves in matters which they felt would give serious offence on the other side of the border. But Finland is a small country of 4 million people which has a long and extremely exposed border with the Soviet Union and lies very close to Russia's second city. I cannot see how that can be compared to the position of Western Europe. I have said earlier, but let me repeat it, that Western Europe has a larger and infinitely more sophisticated as well as industrially more advanced population than the Soviet Union. Its industrial potential is much greater than that of the Soviet Union, and it is separated from the Soviet Union by a band of buffer states. Clearly, the analogy with Finland is totally inapplicable.

Now this brings me back to a point where my own thinking parts company with that of the whole of the West European community, namely the question of nuclear blackmail and political/military pressure.

Stalin said: the nuclear weapon is something with which you frighten people with weak nerves. He could not have been more right. No one in his right senses would yield to any such thing as nuclear blackmail. In the first place, it would be most unlikely (as is the case with most forms of blackmail) that the threat would be made good if one defied it. Secondly, there would be no point in yielding to it. Any régime that has not taken leave of its senses would reject the nuclear threat. "Why in the world should we give in to this?" it would argue. "If we do what you want us to do today in the name of this threat what are you going to ask us to do tomorrow? There is no end to this process. If what you want us to do is to part with our independence—you will have to find others to do your work for you, and that means that you will have to take ultimate responsibility for running this country. We are not going to be the people to turn this government into an instrument of your power. . . ."

We had experience of this kind of situation during the War with the question of the Azores. I was myself deeply involved in it, and it was quite clear that if we came along and threatened (as we almost did) Salazar and said: "You give us these bases or else we will take them", he would have picked up his hat and said: "If I have brought my country to a pass where I have to deal under this type of pressure, I am obviously not a fit ruler of this country. You will have to find someone else for it."

No one would give in to this kind of pressure; nor does anybody use this kind of blackmail. Great governments do not behave that way. Of course, Hitler did with Hacha, in the case of Czechoslovakia; but Hitler was an exception, and I am not sure that Hacha and the Czechs were wise to yield to this anyway.

—Nevertheless, the United States government got the Azores bases, and Salazar did not resign. The American threat was sugared by Roosevelt's letter of guarantee that after the War the bases would be returned; and this was, as we know, the result of your personal intervention with the President and Harry Hopkins. But I would find it difficult to accept that Salazar was not acting in the knowledge of American power, or that any Portuguese government could have ultimately resisted that power.

KENNAN: Roosevelt's guarantee entirely changed the nature of the American approach. Far from acting under a threat, the Portuguese permitted (in addition to the military facilities we requested) Pan American to construct a second airport on the Azores—on behalf of the Portuguese government. This, then, was a transaction between independent governments.

But to resume my argument: when we come to the question of conflict between the Great Powers, there is no nuclear war that could be other than catastrophic for all countries indulging in it; and I think the Russians are well aware of this. The last thing in the world they are going to do is to threaten other governments by saying: "You do what we want you to do or else we'll drop nuclear bombs on you." This is childish; no great government behaves in that way, and the Russians are not going to.

It is of the most profound importance that the proliferation of nuclear weapons be halted. These weapons, which are much too terrible to be in human hands—ours or anybody else's—must be eliminated from the spectrum of possible military instruments. I am deeply distressed that the United States government takes no helpful action along these lines. We could be much bolder, not so much in the negotiations, as in our unilateral policies. The nuclear weapon is simply not a

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rational means of political pressure or action. It is top-heavy and cannot be used for gaining political advantage except against people who, as Stalin said, have weak nerves.

—Are you advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament?

KENNAN: Not all at once, or not without reciprocation, but if no one takes the lead in imposing self-restraint in the development of these weapons, we are never going to get any reduction of them by negotiation.

—You are a man of great goodwill and, at heart, an optimist, though a pessimistic optimist. You first talk of "great governments" which will not commit certain crimes because of some unspoken noblesse oblige *principle which is implied in your use of the word "great." Now you are assuming that the Russians would respond to our moral lead because they share with the rest of us some manifest desire to do the right thing by humanity. I can see no reason for thinking that the Soviet government, or any militant government with enormous power in its hands, has ever acted or would ever act like that.*

KENNAN: We have to lead step by step, and unless there is response, there can be no more concessions for the moment from our side. But you must realise that at the back of this whole great question of military competition, there is an even greater question which people very seldom ask themselves.

We are faced with two conceivable versions of catastrophe. One is a possible, but by no means certain, catastrophe in case we should militarily clash with the Russians. The other is an absolutely certain ecological and demographic disaster which is going to overtake this planet within the next, I would say, 60–70 years, but the effects of which will probably make themselves very painfully felt before the end of this century. The second of these two, if allowed to develop, may be final—there can be no real recovery from it. It is possible that some parts of humanity may survive it; but this would, at best, mean the beginning of a new Dark Age—all we have achieved in Western civilisation over the last 2,000 years would be lost.

In the face of this crisis, which is predictable and now almost inevitable, how can we be so absorbed with the one that is not inevitable—that is to say, the nuclear conflict with Russia—that we concentrate all our energies on the latter? Compared to the dangers which confront us on the ecological and demographic front, the possibility of Soviet control of Western Europe, even if one thought that this was a likely thing to happen (which I don't) would strike me as a minor catastrophe. After all, people *do live* in the Soviet Union. For the mass of people there, life is not intolerable. The same is true in East Germany; the same is true in Hungary. It is not what these people would like; but, still, it is a way of living, and it does not mean the end of the experiment of human civilisation; it leaves the way open for further developments. But from the ecological catastrophe that looms in front of us there is no recovery.

We have been putting the emphasis in the wrong places. We talk of saving Western civilisation when we talk of a military confrontation with Russia—but, saving it for what? In order that 20 or 30 years hence we may run out of oil, and minerals, and food, and invite upon humanity a devastating conflict between the over-populated and undernourished two-thirds of the world and ourselves?

—You have now put forward two powerful reasons for thinking that our concern to save Western civilisation from any real or imaginary Soviet threat is misplaced and indeed erroneous. One is the decadence of the West: the disintegration of the moral fibre of society in Western Europe, and the inability of the United States to offer anything worth learning to the rest of the world. Your second reasoning claims that our entire preoccupation with the danger of Soviet expansionism rests on a false conception of priorities: the ecological disaster will be a certain disaster whereas the Soviet threat is contingent—it will probably never materialise, and if it does, we can survive it.

It does seem to me that the West cannot win in terms of either of your scenarios. Moreover, I would infer from the moral thrust of your reasoning that your tacit message is not only that the West cannot win, but that it doesn't deserve to win.

You have come a long way from advocating, as you did in American Diplomacy (1951),

> **"a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world."**

Are you now really saying that the amount of freedom that exists, for example, in Hungary or Poland is enough to put these basically totalitarian states on a par with Holland or Britain, so much so that the whole concept of the defence of Western civilisation is rendered hollow and (in the face of the possibility of an ecological catastrophe) essentially meaningless?

KENNAN: Of course not. The differences exist and they are important. The decline of the West is not a fully accomplished fact, nor is our stumbling into this great physical catastrophe final. If we in the West could get over this fixation we have with the idea that the Russians are dying to drop bombs on us, and think, instead, of what is happening to our planet, and address ourselves, resolutely and rapidly, to preventing the catastrophe that looms before us, we would be doing a great deal better. You must remember that as far as the pollution of the earth

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is concerned, this is largely the work of the great industrial nations which are spread out around the fertile zones of the northern hemisphere. If they could be induced to behave differently, we would have a breathing space. Otherwise we are going to face irrevocable disaster. Aren't we, then (to repeat something that can never be repeated often enough) being unrealistic in the amount of attention we devote to protecting ourselves from the Russians who, God knows, are not ten feet tall, who have all sorts of troubles of their own, who can't run an agricultural system that really works, who can't adequately house their population, who are rapidly losing their prestige and leadership in the World Communist movement, and have to reckon with China on their long frontier in the East? Isn't it grotesque to spend so much of our energy on opposing such a Russia in order to save a West which is honeycombed with bewilderment and a profound sense of internal decay?

Show me first an America which has successfully coped with the problems of crime, drugs, deteriorating educational standards, urban decay, pornography, and decadence of one sort or another—show me an America that has pulled itself together and is what it ought to be, then I will tell you how we are going to defend ourselves from the Russians. But as things are, I can see very little merit in organising ourselves to defend from the Russians the porno-shops in central Washington. In fact, the Russians are much better in holding pornography at bay than we are.

Please understand that, for purposes of argument, I am given to overstating a case; and that is one of the reasons why you accuse me of contradiction. If one wants to see both sides of a coin, one has, momentarily at least, to bring out each side in exaggerated relief.

—This is also one of the useful hazards of the dialogue, and I am, as you may have noticed to your dismay, myself far from unwilling to overstate a case in order to press home a point.

Your attitude to the defence of the West seems to have undergone a profound change in the last quarter of a century, and possibly even in the last six or seven years, because the passages I am about to cite, although dating back to 1949, were quoted by you with, I must assume, approval in 1968, in the first volume of your Memoirs.

Here then we have a very different estimate of the worth of Western civilisation, and a very different guidance as to how we ought to go about defending ourselves against dictatorships.

The year is 1949; you are revisiting the war-ravaged city of Hamburg which you had known and admired before the war, and this is what you say:

". . . it suddenly appeared to me that in these ruins there was an unanswerable symbolism which we in the West could not afford to ignore. If the Western world was really going to make valid the pretence of a higher moral departure point . . . then it had to learn to fight its wars morally as well as militarily, or not fight them at all; for moral principles were part of its strength. Shorn of this strength, it was no longer itself; its victories were no real victories; and the best it would accomplish in the long run would be to pull down the temple over its own head. The military would stamp this as naivety; they would say that war is war, that when you're in it you fight with every means you have, or go down in defeat. But if that is the case, then there rests upon Western civilisation, bitter as this may be, the obligation to be militarily stronger than its adversaries by a margin sufficient to enable it to dispense with those means which can stave off defeat only at the cost of undermining victory."

This is an impressive passage, and it does seem to suggest that the Western democracies, precisely because they are essentially defensive polities, must be militarily superior to a potential aggressor (1) to deter him, and (2) if the deterrent does not work, to defeat him quickly and decisively.

KENNAN: There may be a certain inconsistency here. But don't forget that the words you cited were written 27 years ago, and even then they were predicated on: "*If* the Western world was really going to make valid the pretence of a higher moral departure point. . . ." Now everything I have said in this conversation goes towards showing that we have not at all been able to make that pretence valid.

My second point is that I have never been averse to the maintenance of strong conventional forces—what I am averse to are the weapons of mass destruction. Now this may strike you as a feeble explanation, and I can see ways in which it could be attacked. But, human nature being what it is, it would be idle to demand that wars of every sort should henceforth be outlawed. One has to keep a sense of relativity about wars and be content to ask that no one should be allowed to engage in wars of mass destruction.

You know how the Chinese used to fight their battles. They would march up with great screaming and blowing of bugles, and beating of drums, and flying of flags; and when they had figured out which side had the stronger forces, victory would be conceded to that side without shooting, which saved the face of the defeated party—and then both sides would march back to where they had started.

—18th-century Europe saw a number of limited wars which were not much more destructive. I'm reminded of Defoe's famous observation: "Now it is frequent to have armies of fifty thousand men of a side at bay within view of another, and spend a whole campaign in dodging, or, as it is genteely called, observing one another, and then march off into winter quarters." And the Earl of Chesterfield, writing in 1757: ". . . even war is pusillanimously carried on in this degenerate age; quarter is given; towns are taken, and the people spared; even in a storm, a woman can hardly hope for the benefit of a rape."

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KENNAN: The 18th century was highly civilised. Today, the intricacies of nuclear strategy and the abstruse theology about "MIRVing" and "throw-weights" would be much better understood if they were seen for what, in fact, they are: symbolic, or, if you like, prophylactic enactments of battles which will never be fought. And the reason they cannot be so regarded at the present time—and I'm coming back to a point I have already made—is that Western Europe has, wrongly and unfortunately, chosen to be dependent on the American nuclear arsenal and is thus unwilling to put up conventional forces of sufficient strength to defend itself. Nor do I just mean that Western Europe ought to provide itself with more tanks, and rockets, and fighter planes. There was something in my Reith Lectures for which I was more ridiculed, and for which I found less understanding, than anything I ever said in my life. This related to the concept of national defence through passive resistance—the concept of making it impossible for a foreign occupier to run a conquered country. Everyone laughed at me. There was a debate in the German *Bundestag*. Willy Brandt was there—"Well", he said, "you must allow every man some foolish ideas. . . ."

I did not, of course, mean that one could erode the power of an occupier in Western Europe by relying exclusively on civil disobedience. But I did think that if a reasonable degree of conventional armaments could be supported by a trained and disciplined civilian population, one need never resort to the use of nuclear weapons.

—What you are advocating is guerrilla warfare.

KENNAN: Yes, if you will, but guerrilla war for defence.

—A Chinese-Vietnamese type of resistance.

KENNAN: Yes, and this kind of thing was done in World War II. But whereas the wartime European underground was improvised very late in the game and with great and unnecessary losses, the underground I have in mind would be well prepared and probably more effective. I can see no objection to this at all. I have been closely associated with a village where I live near Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]; if we had a foreign occupier and the people of the village said: "Let's make up a band, and try to defend ourselves"—I would go with them. This would not be doing anything terrible to anybody—this would be merely trying to protect the fabric of one's life.

—Your own little war of national liberation, in fact.

KENNAN: Yes, if you will; but look at the alternatives. Let us suppose there were to be a nuclear attack of some sort on this country and millions of people were killed and injured. Let us further suppose that we had the ability to retaliate against the urban centres of the country that had attacked us. Would you want to do that? I wouldn't. Granted we had suffered this catastrophe, it would give me no pleasure to know that we followed it up by burning up two or three million civilians in some other great city in the world.

—You are a great gentleman—but the world is not cast in your image. My suspicion is that the plain people in Columbus, Ohio, might take intense pleasure if a Soviet city were incinerated in retaliation for an American; indeed, they might very well demand it. Wasn't the British night-bombing of German cities during the last War very largely a similar exercise, openly undertaken on the strength of the argument that the bombing would maintain British and depress German civilian morale—for the damage it was doing to the German war machine was rather minimal?

KENNAN: I have no high opinion of human beings: they are always going to fight and do nasty things to each other. They are always going to be part animal, governed by their emotions and subconscious drives rather than by reason. They will always, as Freud remarked, feel a grave *Unbehagen*, a discomfort, at having to live in a civilised framework, and kick against it. But if that is so, the only thing you can do with them is to see that the weapons they have are not too terrible. You must prevent them from playing with the worst kind of toys. This is why I feel that the great weapons of mass-destruction—and nuclear arms are not the only conceivable ones—should never be in human hands, that it would be much better to go back, symbolically speaking, to bows and arrows which at least do not destroy nature. I have no sympathy with the man who demands an eye for an eye in a nuclear conflict.

I would be much happier for my children (and this is, again, one of those overstatements which I must ask you not to take too literally for I could argue against it) if we had no nuclear weapons at all—if we were in the position of Norway which has no nuclear arms, or in the position of Mexico. The Norwegians and Mexicans have a chance. Bear in mind that if there is an incentive for the Soviet Government, or any other nuclear power to use these weapons against us, it must be sought in the fact that we are ourselves developing them—only fear could lead anybody to do anything so monstrous.

—But is it fear alone? Might it not be the lure of quick victory, or the megalomania of a dictator with his eye on the main chance?

KENNAN: A nuclear strike would not be a rational action for any government.

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—Are governments always rational? If the actions of ordinary human beings are, as you say, suffused with subconscious drives and other forms of the irrational, I cannot see how one could convincingly argue that the actions of governments, which are made up of the same human material, are subject to different rules. For example, Khrushchev's Cuban venture, to stay within our recent experience, was close to being an irrational act of policy.

KENNAN: We had put weapons into Turkey and many other places close to the Soviet borders, and Khrushchev thought he could, by stationing his missiles in Cuba, develop bargaining power to induce us to withdraw our stuff from Turkey. And although his action did, as it turned out, take us pretty close to a conflict, he did more or less achieve what he had set out to.

You see, I don't view the Soviet leaders as monsters who want to commit great acts of destruction purely for the sake of destruction. They are Marxists whose political purpose undoubtedly requires the spread of their ideology and the expansion of Soviet power; they feel they are on a course of intellectual and political ascendancy—but I don't think the wanton destruction of large numbers of people fits in with their purpose. This is not the Marxist line at all. If they use the Bomb on us, they destroy workers together with the bourgeoisie. What sense would that make?

8. Towards a Euro-Communist Europe?

SUPPOSE NUCLEAR PARITY between the United States and the Soviet Union is an accomplished fact, and the balance of terror is therefore fully effective. That would leave us with a policy of détente as the only rational option open to us. Is there, in that case, any reason why we should not relinquish the somewhat naïve American interpretation of détente, endorse the Soviet definition of "peaceful coexistence", and say to the Russians that we are fully prepared to accept their invitation to political, economic, ideological, and cultural competition as part of the process of détente?

KENNAN: None at all; I think we should. We may not find it easy, though, because détente has been oversold in America so that the US public does not understand how the Russians interpret the concept and how we should react to that interpretation. We should have recognised from the very start that there is only a narrow area in which profitable collaboration is possible between ourselves and the Soviet Government. There is a large area in which it is not possible.

Nevertheless, I would not be trying to set up an Institute for Advanced Russian Studies [at the Smithsonian Institution] if I thought that there weren't areas for productive exchange with the Soviet Union. When I look back over the years—and my memories go back further than almost anybody's who speaks on this subject—I see a certain improvement in the sense that the area of collaboration is broader today than it was in the Stalin period. It is a slow improvement, but it is not insignificant; and I see no reason for throwing the baby out with the bath water and returning to the Cold War policy of name-calling, hurling threats at each other, and hounding our own people because they are suspected of having had some sympathy with the Soviet Union many years ago.

I don't want to go back to all that, and I cannot for the life of me understand what it is that our hard-liners in this country really want. They want more armaments, of course, nothing like this pittance of a hundred billion dollars for defence. The defence budget, they demand, should be much larger than that and, with it, the national budgetary deficit and our inflation. But suppose they get a much larger defence budget; suppose we arm to the teeth; suppose that instead of having 15–20,000 nuclear weapons, we make ourselves happy by having 35,000. The fact of the matter is that 200 would make life impossible anywhere we wanted to.

But suppose we found some comfort in these vast figures, suppose we achieved a much stronger stance, and then sat back and hurled imprecations at the Soviet leaders and their system—where would we go from there? I don't see much future in this; I can't see how anyone would benefit. I suppose some naïve people would then want us to say: "Now we are very strong—we have 35,000 of these weapons, you have only 28,000; we will put our terms to you, and you do what we want you to do, or else." I don't think this would work—blackmail can act both ways.

I notice there has been some talk of demanding political concessions from the Russians as a *quid pro quo* for United States wheat. This, too, would be a very unwise course to enter upon.

—You feel the Soviet mismanagement of agriculture and the resulting shortages should not be exploited by the United States.

KENNAN: We should not withhold wheat for political purposes. If we find it desirable to sell wheat on certain terms and the Russians want to buy it, fine. I would not recommend using the results of a bad Soviet harvest as a means of putting pressure on the Soviet Government.

—Do you think there is something in the argument that the grain deal is wrong, not because it means leaving the American "bread weapon" unexploited, but because it

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contributes to the world (and especially the poor world's) food shortage by failing to discourage the Soviet Union from maintaining a highly inefficient agricultural system? The argument is, on ecological grounds, unassailable. Can we afford the mismanagement of so much of the world's arable land?

KENNAN: The problem with withholding wheat is the same as the problem arising from our support of Soviet dissidents. In both cases we would, rightly or wrongly, be seen by the Soviet leaders as putting pressure on them to induce them to depart from their present policies in the direction of liberalisation, and that, in turn, would be interpreted by them as the beginning of the overthrow of their rule. And I'm not sure that it would not be. In other words, this may well be a path which they cannot enter upon except to their own ultimate undoing.

I have, of course, no sympathy with the principles of Soviet government. I don't want to see Soviet rule preserved because I think it is admirable; but I have (and we spoke of this a little earlier) the greatest misgivings about any of us, Americans or West Europeans, taking upon ourselves the responsibilitity for trying to overthrow this, or any other, government in Russia, because we have in our pockets no alternatives.

Never forget that some years before the Russian Revolution, in 1911 to be precise, we were faced with almost exactly the same problem —the persecution of Russian Jews—and we abrogated (under President Taft) a trade agreement with Russia in protest against the treatment of Russian Jews. And my namesake, George Kennan the elder, was busy for many years trying to whip up sympathy for the Russian revolutionaries, admittedly not the Bolsheviks but their moderate predecessors, the Populists. The assumption behind all this was that if one could only overthrow the old Czarist autocracy, something much better would follow. Have we learned anything from this lesson?

—Using the food weapon may, of course, be an unsavoury way of making a political point, but if we rule out the use of those weapons we have—food because it is immoral, nuclear weapons because they are too destructive, economic pressure because the devil we know strikes us as being more manageable than the one we don't—aren't we, in fact, exercising a form of pre-emptive capitulation?

KENNAN: We would be keeping one weapon, *the* most essential, which you have neglected to mention: our internal strength—the vigour of our society—if, that is, we succeed in reviving that strength and restoring that vigour.

But you are correct in saying that I can see no use for the weapons you have listed. I do exempt, as I said before, the conventional forces. We should have stronger and better equipped forces in Western Europe (although before I would go in for great quantitative increases I should like to see us improve the human quality of our troops, get rid of drug abuse, poor discipline, *PX* corruption and so on); so I am not against all forms of strength. But I don't want to see our economic muscle applied in order to bring about the destruction of Soviet power. I don't want to have any responsibility at all for what happens in Russian affairs for, as I have just said, I am not at all sure that what would come after it would be any better than what we have today. I can see no evidence in Russia of any understanding of the principles of democracy, except on the part of Sakharov and a very small number of dissidents.

As a matter of fact, Russia was much more fit for democratic development in 1914 than she is today. Mind you, she was not very fit *then*, but she was better equipped than she is in 1976 because, in the meantime, some 50 million people have died unnatural deaths in the Soviet Union, among them a very high percentage of the more thoughtful, cultured and sensitive people who alone would have been able to guide Russian political life in a more liberal direction. Today you will find that many of the people who, for one reason or another, run away from Russia in opposition to the Soviet government and end up on our shores aren't at all looking for a liberal-democratic alternative—that while they may be anti-Soviet, their ideals of how Russia ought to be governed are heavily affected by their experiences of living in a totalitarian society. The Soviet régime has rubbed off on them.

I am very sceptical about the limits of their tolerance. These people are very Russian, and the idea of compromise, especially in the ideological field, is alien to them. And it is as well to remember that this has always been the way with the Russians. If you follow the development of Russian political life between 1906 and 1914, the striking thing is the gross intolerance that existed, not just on the side of the government, but in the whole of Russian society. Indeed it is true to say that, from the Decembrists to the Bolshevik Revolution, the intolerance, the unwillingness to compromise, to permit gradual improvement, was greater within the revolutionary movement than it was on the part of the autocracy.

—If this is so, Western Europe's hope of having a less menacing and domestically less detestable power for a neighbour—whether through détente, Cold War, or balance-of-power politics—is bound to be disappointed for (as you say) the Russians will remain Russians no matter whether they operate under the sign of autocracy, communism, or the Russian nation-state.

Now assuming, as I would, that the weaknesses of the

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West and the ascendancy of the Soviet Union make the Soviet domination of Western Europe at least a possibility, then one is faced with the unpleasant prospect that Russian power, any Russian power, would spell a Czechoslovak type of experience for the whole of Western Europe. The familiar 19th-century notion of Russia as "the gendarme of Europe" would then acquire a fresh relevance.

May I say that I am not wholly convinced that your judgment of the unalterability of the Russian character is correct? You seem to assume a little too readily that the man on the opposite side of the fence from us is much more unbending than we are, and much less capable of meeting us halfway than we ought to be willing to meet him. In 1943 you said "nationalist Germany **is** *Germany." Of Yugoslavia you assumed in 1963 that it would remain a Marxist-Leninist state for the foreseeable future. And two years before the death of Stalin you said you expected no basic change in the Soviet Union. It would, of course, be possible to argue that Germany still* **is** *a nationalist state, that Yugoslavia has* **not** *departed from the Marxist-Leninist line, and that the changes in Russia since 1953 have not been* **basic**. *But I would submit that the burden of evidence lies the other way.*

KENNAN: Russian influence would be an undemocratic influence in Europe if you can conceive of such a thing as a complete Russian domination of Western Europe. I can't quite conceive of it myself; I don't think the Russians are that great—I don't think they could do it technically. To dominate large areas with massive populations, in the first place military occupation would be necessary. I don't think they would relish the prospect. They would, for one thing, have a grave problem with their own troops: their exposure to the influences of a much more advanced and wealthier civilisation would be certain to have a devastating effect on them. We saw this happen even during World War II when Western Europe, in the shape of Germany, offered a much less damaging standard for comparison than Western Europe would offer today.

—I am a little wary of the argument that the Soviet Union would wisely abstain from taking this or that country lest it might not be able to digest it. Certainly in the past, the fear of over-extension seldom inhibited powers on the march. I am reminded of one curious fear which surfaced among the Western Allies towards the end of the War: the fear that the Soviet Union would, out of economic prudence, not agree to occupy any part of Germany but leave the whole burden of the final defeat of Hitler to the West. You mention this incident in your Memoirs, *and your comment is:*

"Little did these people understand Soviet political ambitions."

May I, at this point, quote that sentence against you?

KENNAN: I still don't think the Russians could have coped with the whole of Germany; East Germany was just about all they could manage.

—But wouldn't today an expansion of Soviet power to Western Europe be prepared by and supported by various Western Communist parties and their fellow-travellers, even though some of them have (it remains to be seen how lastingly) fallen out of grace with Moscow? Wouldn't, for example, the French communists simply eat their recent words repudiating "the dictatorship of the proletariat", once the Soviet troops had crossed the Rhine or threatened to do so?

KENNAN: Well, the Soviet leaders always have had to recognise that a Communist party which comes to power in a given country and then disposes over the resources of that country is in a far more independent position *vis-à-vis* Moscow than a struggling, revolutionary party which is dependent on Soviet support. Stalin, for example, was well aware that a Communist revolution in Germany could not be controlled from Moscow, because the question would immediately arise: "Where is the home of Communism?" So I am not at all sure that, even if (and I would again stress the hypothetical nature of this question) Soviet domination were to be extended to Western Europe, Moscow would want to build its West European hegemony on the Communist parties there.

—Of course, we wouldn't want to see whether it would or wouldn't!

KENNAN: Certainly not—I always felt that Russian hegemony over Western Europe would be the greatest catastrophe.

But I don't attribute to the Russians the political and ideological capability of controlling hundreds of millions of West Europeans. They would find West Europeans, by virtue of their numbers, background and sophistication, much harder to regiment and control than they did the people of Eastern Europe. They have much more to put up in opposition to Soviet power. Moreover, there are limits to every form of imperialism; even the power of a militant régime on-the-make is not unlimited. You have said that "over-extension" has seldom acted as a deterrent. But I would remind you that there is such a thing as spreading oneself too thin: Napoleon showed this, and Hitler showed it too. I was stationed, as a diplomat, in Germany during part of the War, and I visited almost every Nazi-occupied country. I came away with the impression that even if Hitler had won the War, he would not have been able to maintain the empire he was trying to establish.

—The ideological appeal of Nazism outside Germany was, naturally, very limited, and the Nazi type of parties Hitler could rely on were small (though, considering

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their size, very effective). Yet a Belgian Nazi like Degrelles was just not in the same league as a man like Marchais or Mitterand who took 49% of the vote in the last French presidential elections. If the Quislings of the Second World War were aptly called a "fifth column", would it be inappropriate to coin a much stronger phrase today for the subversive potential of the large Communist parties in Western Europe?

KENNAN: It is true enough that the indigenous elements on which the Nazis would have been able to base their rule over Europe were far weaker than those on which the Soviets would be able to base theirs. I once pointed this out in a report I wrote during the War: an ideology of the glorification of the German race was singularly unsuited to appeal to young Frenchmen!

On the other hand, the Germans themselves had much more effective people, more capable administrators, and greater self-confidence than the Russians had ever had. When they overran a country, they had the men who spoke the language, could take charge of the railways and the telephone system, and were not only competent to perform a great many other tasks, but were also endowed with enough self-confidence to win, to some extent, the respect of the local people. The Russians would not be able to do any of these things.

—But they would, I still think, more than make up for this deficiency by being able to call upon the services of local Communists and trade-union people—and of these there will always be enough to keep the wheels turning.

KENNAN: Do you think sophisticated Western Marxists would really accept Russian tutelage? Look at Moscow—it is ideologically the most bankrupt capital in the world. Its entire message is absurdly out-of-date—which is also the main reason for the growing restlessness of the Russian intelligentsia.

—The Russians know that. But young Arthur Scargill (the Communist leader of the Yorkshire miners) doesn't. And even if he did, he would probably decide that, "on balance", there was less to be feared from the "excesses" of socialism than from the "bankruptcy of capitalism."

KENNAN: But for God's sake, the Soviet version of socialism is so absolutely stultified—it hasn't changed since 1910—that it makes no sense at all in relation to our present problems. There may be Arthur Scargill, but you are not going to fool many West European socialists.

—You needn't fool too many. A highly disciplined minority—even a few thousand men in key industrial positions—might decide the issue. The British example is a good warning.

KENNAN: Of course, you *can* get a hammer-lock on society through a determined minority. But, all in all, I attribute much more importance to national differences than you do. The East European example is somewhat deceiving. It is true that the first generation of East European leaders was selected by Moscow; but as a new generation comes along, the differences, and the spirit of independence, tend to assert themselves. I would remind you that all through Eastern Europe the intellectual acceptance of Russia is virtually nil. The East Europeans regard the Russians, at best, as insufferable bores. They mock their dogmatism and the sterility of their thinking. They are certainly not under Russian cultural influence. I can see all this encapsulated in East European attitudes to my own field, Russian studies, which are incomparably stronger in the United States than they are anywhere in Eastern Europe where even the teaching of the Russian language is resisted. What I'm trying to say is that even under full Soviet hegemony the national peculiarities of individual countries would have a way of coming out on top.

—I am not suggesting (in the hypothetical eventuality we are discussing) that Western Europe would, overnight, come under the direct rule of Moscow. Much more probably, we would have Marxist or partly Marxist régimes in national colours; and I concede that these régimes might not always agree either with the interests or the orthodoxy of Moscow.

Yet, the **net** *effect of all this would be an enormous step forward for the Soviet Union both as keeper of the faith and as a world power, and a very great, and perhaps irreversible, step backwards for the West as a free society. Or should one go along with the cynical view that the "building of socialism" in the Soviet Union is so dependent on Western credits and economic cooperation that the Soviet Union simply cannot afford to have the Western economies ruined by Communist rule?*

KENNAN: I wonder. I would have thought—and we have already touched on this—that the danger of a Marxist control of West European society would be coming not so much from the threat of Soviet domination as from within the West European countries themselves. What I mentioned earlier about the ideological predilections of university youth in Norway is also pertinent to the point in hand. Quite briefly: the passionate belief among young Europeans that the Third World is composed of unsung heroes, and that a wicked United States is trying to do horrible things to Africans and Asians, is not taken to the point where the Soviet system would automatically benefit. And in so far as the Russians are behind some of the student radicalism, I must say they have been far more successful in peddling distrust of the United States than in peddling trust of the Soviet Union. In the former, they have

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been successful beyond their fondest dreams. But in their attempt to combine their image of the United States as a monster, with a matchingly angelic picture of the Soviet Union being, as it is, fraternally helpful to the Third World—in this they have dismally failed.

—In my more whimsical moments I sometimes feel that the Marxism of radical youth in the West is part of the "chic Nostalgia" of the 1970s—a modish reversion to 19th-century beards, bombs, and conspiracies. (One of the popular pubs in the town of Brighton where I live rejoices in the name **Papa Jenkins Bar "Revolution"**.*) There is a sense in which the popular scientism of Marx's theory fits in charmingly with the aspidistras and antimacassars of his time.*

KENNAN: There is a lot in that; if you want to see 19th-century Europe in action you must go to Russia or some parts of Eastern Europe where you can study it first hand. But that would also confirm my opinion that, despite all the current radical chic, Western Europe, and especially West European socialism, is most unlikely to take lessons from the ossified doctrines of Soviet ideology.

9. Helsinki & Other Delusions

WE HAVE NOW ruled out both nuclear pressure and economic strength as bargaining counters against the Soviet Union. What are our chances of enforcing the freedoms we have written into "Basket Three" of the Helsinki document?

KENNAN: Helsinki was a sterile two-year exercise in semantics which was bound to lead to very little. I have always said that I did not believe in trying to reach agreements with the Russians on general principles. The first advice given by the first representative in Russia of the London Muscovy Company under Queen Elizabeth I was: "When you deal with these people, make your bargains plain and put them in writing." This still holds true today. I believe in dealing with the Soviet government on specifics. I would not sign any agreement with them which went beyond stating: "This is what *you* undertake to do, and this is what *we* undertake to do." The idea of saying that we are both going to behave like good democrats, that we are both going to recognise human rights and so forth, is a mistake from the beginning.

—Why, then, did we do it?

KENNAN: I don't know—I never understood the origins of this policy. Our people in Washington say it was the West Europeans who got us into Helsinki. It was unfortunate all the way through, what with this silly assembly of heads of states in Helsinki, as though they had nothing better to do than sign fatuous declarations! It was all wasted motion.

—But it wasn't from the Soviet point of view. Didn't Helsinki confer a sense of legitimacy on the Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe, which was one of the things the Russians were eager to have?

KENNAN: Yes, and I don't quite understand why they did want it so badly. No one with authority or prestige in Western Europe has, since the 1940s, desired to see the division of the Continent eliminated. In fact, as we have just seen, they are terrified of the very idea; therefore, to say that we have no intention of eliminating the division of Europe by force was a very mild statement indeed. And not only do we have no intention to achieve it by force—we have no intention to achieve it in any other way. Nothing could embarrass the NATO ministers more than the detachment of one of these East European countries from the Soviet Union, and its sudden presentation on their doorstep. We saw this happen in the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the fear is again implied in Sonnenfeldt's remarks to which you referred.

I cannot tell you how amazed I am at the power of "little Europeanism" in Western Europe. People in Europe are *attached* to the idea that Europe ends at the Elbe! They love it! I think it was Freud who said about the Germans that those living East of the Elbe were baptised late and very badly. I always felt that Dr Adenauer was firmly of this view, and did not want to have anything to do with the East. That is all right as far as it goes —but one day, you know, one may again have to have something to do with these people.

Now you have already quoted Raymond Aron against me to the effect that the division of Europe, though absurd, is more palatable to Europeans than a fluid situation would be. Well, this makes sense for a Western Europe which has no confidence in its past, or its present, or its future—which has parted with any sense, not only of its world mission, but of its European mission as well. I suppose this is the terrible, delayed punishment for the madness of two World Wars. The damages they did have shown themselves to be much more insidious than we were, for many years, inclined to recognise, particularly the devastation of 1914–1918.

World War II was fought on a very clear issue, for Hitler had put the challenge in such a way that there wasn't very much you could do except fight him. But World War I was an unnecessary war, and it was carried far beyond the point where it could have done any conceivable good. It could have stopped to far better effect in 1916

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than 1918. It was the self-destruction of Europe, a slaughter of the flower of European youth, and the death of European self-confidence. Of course, the roots of the demise of Europe go much further back—I see the disintegration of Europe beginning already in the 1880s—and I am, in my new book, in the process of taking the story back to the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894.

But how, you might ask, is the Franco-Russian story relevant to the problems of our age? One of the things I find myself developing in the course of this study is the realisation that it should not have taken the nuclear weapon to persuade us that war between great peoples in the modern age—total war—is a madness from which nobody can benefit. This was already on the cards in the 1880s; we should have read and digested the lessons of the Franco-Prussian War, the Russo-Turkish War and, above all, of course, the Russo-Japanese War. We should have realised that modern war was becoming suicidally destructive, and done something about it. But we didn't; and so we staggered into World War I. In studying the circumstances surrounding the Franco-Russian Alliance one can test and illustrate, in simpler form, some of the complex realities of our own world. And this is, in one important sense, what history is about.

—You said at the beginning of this conversation that you saw the roots of the ills of our civilisation further back still: in industrialisation itself, and you have stated why. I am therefore struck by the small amount of space and thought you devote to Marxism in your Memoirs. *In Volume II there is not a single mention of Marx or Marxism, and in the first volume the references are very sparse—most of them quotations from your diplomatic despatches. Given the ideological temper of much of your own thinking, this would, on the face of it, call for some explanation.*

KENNAN: I was brought up in a family of Puritan culture. My ancestors never owned capital. They worked with their hands, long and hard. They were neither self-conscious about their poverty, nor bitter about the fact that it existed. Not one of them was to any important degree an employer; not one of them sold his labour. Thus, the classic social predicament, which provides the kernel of Marxist theory, was outside our experience. The image of the blood-sucking Capitalist wielding power over the down-trodden but pure Worker was alien to us.

I was always inclined to view the horrible experience of the industrial worker in the early phases of industrialisation as a great misunderstanding rather than an act of moral iniquity or the result of some inexorable law of history. Anton Chekhov has a wonderful story about the doctor who is called out to see the neurotic daughter of a factory-owner. In those days, you must remember, the factory-owners had their mansions right in the middle of the compounds of their factories. Well, the doctor had to stay overnight and he got to reflecting on the absurdity of the whole situation. The owner's daughter was neurotic and the rest of the family was extremely unhappy; the two thousand men in the factory slaved through the week in a dream and woke up only on Saturday nights, in the pub. For whom was all this being done? The only person who drew any satisfaction out of it was the factory-owner's tyrannical German governess. Obviously, the doctor observed, we are in the presence here of some vast misunderstanding.

Well, I always thought this was a much more charitable and profound analysis than the alleged laws of history on which Marxism bases its charismatic claim.

—This is a good Marxist explanation of your rejection of Marxism. But there are, I think, also more endogenous reasons for your rejection of it, and I infer their existence from the fact that you never enjoyed studying philosophy, that you started but never finished reading Das Kapital, *that you regard the whole idea of the class struggle as a form of racial discrimination, and its militant Soviet-Russian variant as a mere fig-leaf of respectability for traditional Russian nationalism.*

KENNAN: I suppose I belong to that, for Marxists, most objectionable class of people who are neither Marxists nor anti-Marxists but live outside the entire conceptual framework of both. I have seen too much beastliness committed in the name of messianic ideas to believe that a Marxist type of fanaticism is more likely to achieve a just and humane order than a measure of common civility and affection in the conduct of one's own life. And behind this modesty of ambition there is the recognition of a vital truth to which I have already drawn attention in this discussion—the recognition that the decisive source of evil is not in social and political institutions, and, in most cases, not even in the will of politicians, soldiers, and bureaucrats, but simply in the weaknesses and weariness of the human soul itself. And these are not cured by social engineering.

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Michael Wharton

Dr Spaceley-Trellis

A Profile

IT WOULD BE HARD nowadays to find any holder of high office (or for that matter, low office) in the Church of England who has not said and gone on saying that if the Church is to survive it has got to "move with the times." But none, certainly none of episcopal degree, can have said it more often or tried to apply the principal over a wider field than the present Bishop of Bevindon.

The rise of Dr Edwin Narcourt Spaceley-Trellis to the episcopate has been rapid. He comes of a clerical family. His father, Dr Norbert Spaceley-Trellis, was Dean of Nerdley and one of the earliest enthusiasts in the Church for what was called, in the years after the First World War, "the Great Russian Experiment in Social Justice." In a sermon on the death of Lenin in 1924, preached at Nerdley All Saints, he drew parallels between Lenin and Jesus Christ which caused some criticism at the time; and had it not been pre-empted, it would probably have earned him the title of "the Red Dean."

YOUNG EDWIN GREW UP in a household where the works of Sidney and Beatrice Webb were not only to be found in every room but were read aloud by his father on Sundays after Evensong. After Winchester, Oxford, theological college, and a short spell as an unofficial assistant chaplain attached to the International Brigade's rear headquarters in London (he is thought to have been the author of the occasional unsigned "Notes from the Clerestory" in C. Cockburn's periodical *The Week*), he saw war service in England as a chaplain in the Army Education Corps; and with his energy and drive he had much to do with the potent opinion-forming work of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs.

Oddly enough, his first curacy, in what he laughingly calls "a humdrum North London parish" widened rather than narrowed his sphere of action. With his flair for self-publicity he was soon one of the best-known of the younger, progressive clergymen who began to appear in quite large numbers in the early 1950s. But with an equal flair for self-preservation and self-advancement he took care not to become too closely identified with the leather-jacketed, "ton-up" and guitar-strumming clergy of that time. He was after bigger things than an ephemeral newspaper story of "Bebop in the Aisles." "Trendy" he might be, but his own trend was towards higher things. In 1955 he was appointed to the See of Bevindon; at 40 he was one of the youngest men ever to reach the Anglican Episcopate. If he has remained at Bevindon ever since it has been largely by his own choice. A handy "mix" of ancient cathedral city, New Town, with a large element of London "overspill", industrial estates and decaying rural areas, the diocese has everything the Bishop needs, in his own words, for "secular-religious take-off."

THERE ARE OTHER ANGLICAN BISHOPS who have accepted parts of what is called "the Left-wing Package Deal"; Dr Trellis has the distinction of carrying, under his outsize mitre, the whole lot. Stern opposition to "racism", "sexism", "heightism", and "élitism" of every kind, a belief that censorship (except of those opposed to his own views) is "the ultimate

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obscenity", commitment to total sexual and every other kind of freedom merge with a dedication to scientific and technological progress which has only lately begun to falter slightly with the coming of "environmentalism." Not that there is really any difficulty here. The Bishop, through all vicissitudes and changes of fashion, has never wavered in his belief that "an open-ended dialogue in the context of this day and age" (a phrase which is seldom off his lips) must yield the "solution" to "every problem in the whole gamut of our human predicament" (a phrase which is usually on his lips when they are not busy with the other one).

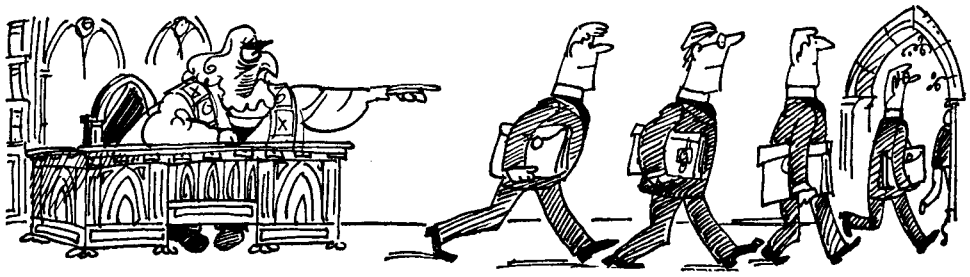
Dr Trellis's book *God the Humanist*, which appeared in 1960, gives some idea of his religious position at that time. To quote a contemporary review:

"Dr Trellis holds that Jesus was a brilliant technologist of Left-wing, humanist views who was disgusted by the neglect of technology and social advance in the Roman Empire owing to its out-of-date class-structure. He and the 'first-class sociological research team' he gathered round him, called 'the Twelve Disciples' by backward-looking, myth-bound people at that time, conducted a vigorous civil disobedience movement for peace and higher living standards, for 'One Man, One Vote' and for nationalisation of the commanding heights of the Judaean economy. Only historical factors, still imperfectly understood, prevented Jesus and his team from campaigning for 'free elections' in Viet Nam, majority rule in Rhodesia, a naval blockade of South Africa, and the abolition of the public schools.

"Such, according to Dr Trellis, is the essential heart of the Gospel. The rest, as we now have it, is mainly superstitious, pre-scientific speculation about human behaviour (what we should now call 'adaptation to the environment'), mythical, 'supernatural beings', and so on. All this was inserted by reactionary priests and other instruments of the Establishment anxious to slow down Man's onward march to the Humanist Millennium. . . ."

How was the church to put these concepts into practical shape? The Bishop explained in a forceful sermon, using a metaphor appropriate to a period of "Growth": "In this day and age the Church must be an industry like any other. From the point of view of growth and expansion it is handicapped by masses of obsolete plant in the shape of inefficient, redundant church and cathedral buildings. They must be scrapped and replaced or reprogrammed from crypt to steeple. Again . . . both sides of the industry—clergy and laity—have their efficiency problems. In the congregations, restrictive practices are far too rife. On the management side there is too much concern with superfluous matters like theology, prayer, worship and services not geared to consumer-demand in Welfare Britain."

Turning to the export market, the Bishop said the clergy should "get out there and sell. To give an example, there is no reason, given a vigorous, fully competitive marketing organisation, why the prefabricated, all-purpose, secular, ecumenical religious product now being mass-produced in my own diocese should not smash inspiringly into the world spiritual big-selling league. In ecclesiastical efficiency methods the Communist countries have much to teach us. By rationalising the churches—in some cases out of existence altogether—they have helped them to realise their true place in the modern world."



Dr Trellis's concern for progress and freedom from the shackles of the past has been shown in great and small matters alike. A newspaper report just after the victory of Labour in the General Election of 1964, when it seemed to some thinkers that a New Dawn

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was at least tentatively at hand, is typical: "There has been some criticism among stuffy people of a new poster sponsored by Dr Spaceley-Trellis, the go-ahead Bishop of Bevindon. It shows a clergyman nude except for his clerical collar . . . with the caption: BE LIKE HIM—GET WITH IT—DROP IN AT YOUR LOCAL CHURCH NEXT SUNDAY! . . . 'The Church has got to move with the times in this day and age', commented Dr Spaceley-Trellis. . . . 'It has got to use the techniques which modern science has placed in our hands for good or ill. There is nothing shameful about nudity. A nude clergyman is a living testimony to the truths of progressive religion. The people who are objecting to this poster are the sort who voted Tory at the General Election. As Christians we must be charitable and understanding of this filthy, inhuman scum', he added, his face turning purple and his eyes beginning to revolve in opposite directions, 'but I would not care to be in their shoes on Judgment Day.' . . ."

ANOTHER REPORT SHOWS the wide range of the Bishop's activities and his readiness to identify the Church with social and other trends: "Dr Spaceley-Trellis . . . has suggested that a team of surgeons from the Medical School of Bevindon University should perform a heart-transplant operation on the High Altar of the Cathedral. This will be part of what he calls 'a complete re-jigging of our religious productivity drive in the light of modern knowledge.' . . ." As well as the transplant operation a special all-secular service was to feature (simultaneously) pop music by the Spirochaetes Group, a happening, "Cybernetic Nudity" by the American Marylou Ogreburg Anti-Dance Company, and a solemn dedication of the new contraceptive vendomat machines to be installed in the People's Narthex. There was also a mass-demonstration against the Greek Colonels, organised by popular revolutionary fun-person and TV personality Gastriq Ali.

There were some objections, mainly on doctrinal grounds, from reactionary elements in the diocese which had somehow escaped the recent shake-out of redundant or under-productive clerical executives who failed to reach work-norm targets. But the Bishop was confident of dealing with any opposition. "Some of these reverend gentlemen may be socially useless", he said with a meaning laugh, "but their hearts are not."

DR TRELLIS SAW THE DEVELOPMENT of a "multi-racial" society in Great Britain as a real opportunity to "break down barriers" and assert a true ecumenicalism. "Religion is simply one facet of our social progress in a consumer society. We must develop it as such. Instead of offering children . . . the same old stereotyped line of religious consumer goods, we must provide a choice. We must allow the customer—and we all know the importance of child-spending power in this day and age—to pick and choose: to take, say, a piece of the Bible here, a slice of the Koran there, a colourful fragment of the Bhagavad Gita or the Popul Vuh there, and make up the whole into his own 'personalised' religious package—the Religion that is Right For Him."

In another sermon, in support of the Churches' "Declaration on World Poverty" which had been attacked by Mr Enoch Powell, he suggested that Judas Iscariot might have been the first Powellite. "He urged all present", says a report, "to sign the declaration and strike a blow for the true Christian spirit against the evil, violent spirit of Powellism, which Christ himself had specifically condemned. He darted from his pulpit and signed the declaration several times over, signing the walls and even the faces of some members of his flock in his enthusiasm. Those who

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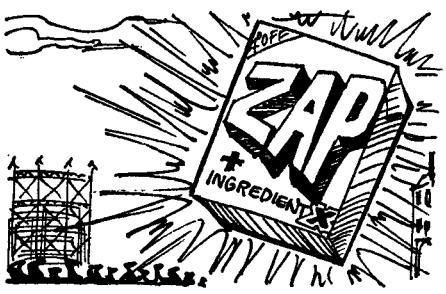
were slow or reluctant to sign soon felt the weight of his massive plywood crozier and fled howling from the Cathedral amid the hisses and four-letter words of the faithful. After the service a dummy figure of Enoch Powell was burned in the Close, as the original was not available, and the Bishop joined in a wild, multi-racial 'soul' dance round the bonfire. . . ."



DR TRELLIS'S INFLUENCE was now beginning to be felt all over the country, and not only in the strictly religious field. In 1969, for instance, Nadir Fooderamas, the great supermarket chain which covers much of the West Midlands, had all its shops open on Good Friday for the first time. By 9 o'clock that morning, as was reported, huge queues of shoppers had formed outside all the main branches. "One queue stretched for over three miles, right across the Nerdley and Soup Hales Canal, in which a dozen women stood up to the waist in water, holding up their still empty shopping baskets, their faces bright with ecstasy. . . . There were unconfirmed reports of miracles, including an apparition of a gigantic packet of "ZAP" Metabiological Washing Powder (developed by a team of 96 leading scientists). . . .

"As all the fooderamas opened promptly at 9 o'clock a great cry went up. Many of the shoppers fell on their knees, before surging excitedly yet reverently into the bright, consumer-welcoming lanes. . . . Canon Austen Fredds, the forward-looking Vicar of Nerdley (a member of Dr Spaceley-Trellis's 'Left Bank' School of space-age theologians), had previously toured the area to give shoppers his secular blessing. 'Most heartening. A festival truly relevant for our day and age', was his beaming comment. 'It has given a genuine, contemporary meaning to a term many of us find needlessly puzzling: Good Friday. I think we can say it is really "good" at last, not merely for the privileged few, but for Britain's developing society of fair shares for all'."

"COMPASSION" AND "COMMITMENT" have always been the Bishop's watchwords. This was shown very strikingly in 1970, when the fashion for huge Pop Festivals ("services of secular consecration for Youth") began to reach England. When plans for a gigantic gathering in the West Country were announced there was opposition from local residents, particularly to a scheme by the organisers to evacuate them temporarily from their homes. But Dr Trellis gave the project enthusiastic support. "The festival", he said, "will be an assertion of the uncorrupted ideals of Youth. It will be a relevant, meaningful gesture of dissent against the false values of commercialism and exploitation. . . . No wonder every evil, reactionary racist and Powellite in the neighbourhood is against it. What we are witnessing is the long-expected puritan, Fascist backlash."

The Bishop's whole-hearted dedication to the cause of Youth explains one thing which puzzles many of his admirers: his fondness for dressing in full canonicals, with mitre and crozier. His own explanation is that he does it partly for "kicks" and partly to match the "way-out" brightly-coloured dress of the young (he is equally at home with beaded Hippies as with Nazi-helmeted Hell's Angels), thus neatly "sending up" the symbols of ecclesiastical dignity and authority.

THE BISHOP, OF COURSE, HAS HAD TO FACE considerable opposition from obscurantist elements, even in his own diocese. At one time there was a controversy about whether or not church plate should be sold. The Bishop issued a pastoral letter for the confiscation and sale of all such articles in his diocese. Some of the money was used to build multi-denominational social centres incorporating sex-advice bureaux and race-relations units; but most of it went to the "World Council of Left-wing Churches" and to approved charities like "Communist Aid." Some of the older clergy, not quite in tune with the times, disapproved of the order and even went so far as to hide their plate in crypts and belfries, or in their own mattresses.

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The Bishop had a short answer to this. He put Canon Alan Nethers ("the Vandals' Padre") in charge of a special strong-arm squad of young clerical enforcement officers with orders to find the hidden treasure at all costs. The methods they used (as the Bishop, surveying the smoking ruins of one ancient rectory, laughingly said) "made the Dissolution of the Monasteries look like a vicarage tea-party." Dr Trellis wanted to have one particularly fine Elizabethan silver chalice beaten into a sub-machine-gun and presented, at a special service of dedication, to Wellington Nwamzamba, a Rhodesian terrorist attached to the cathedral chapter; but for technical reasons this proved impossible.

THE BISHOP HAS SOLVED the problem of the distribution of what he calls "my clerical labour force" in a way which is an example to other dioceses. In the central control room of the Bishop's Palace, a strikingly functional building designed by Sir Basil Gibberish, a computer has been installed and is constantly programmed with the latest population figures in all parishes and the number of clergy available. The Bishop can thus ensure that, at any given time, the number of "clerical executives" and "pastoral sales reps" is exactly proportionate to the number of "congregation consumer units." The result is that none of the rural parishes, where there are still quite a few practising Christians, now have any clergymen at all —while the great petro-chemical and plastics complex at Bevindon New Town, where the people, when not actively hostile, are indifferent to any kind of religion (barring a little mild pseudo-Buddhism among the young), has no less than 17 incumbents, as well as four at present in mental hospitals and two in casualty wards.

ON LITURGICAL QUESTIONS the Bishop's attitude is unequivocal. A version of the New Testament, produced by the diocesan computer, goes further, he believes, than any other modern version in its appeal to the average man and woman of today—"making them aware of Change and initiating a relevant, structural, meaningful dialogue for the crisis of communication in this day and age. . . ." The Bevindon Version of the Lord's Prayer runs:

Principle of Evolutionary Humanism implicit in Man's Progress to World Government and Universal Welfare, let us respect the nomenclature by which you are known. It is to be hoped that optimum social conditions will soon be established in a contemporary material context as well as in the yet conjectural futurological sphere. It is to be hoped that adequate daily nourishment will be available for all; and that our occasional lapses from efficiency may be allowed for as we allow for them in others; also that we avoid circumstances in which we fail to adjust to our environment. Bearing all this in mind, we may sum up by saying that your main principle of operation is implicit in the biosphere, and is in control of it, to the satisfaction of all, on a permanent basis.

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DR TRELLIS HAS ALSO SOLVED the liturgical problem by means of computerised services. In these each member of the congregation can operate a panel which feeds a central computer with suggestions and modifications which are incorporated in the service while it is actually proceeding. Not only are no two services exactly alike, but the participants have no idea at the outset of what any particular service will turn out to be.

Commitment to the idea of infinitely variable, multi-racial, and ecumenical worship has sometimes led to difficulties, as a report from 1972, when the problem of redundant churches was much in the air, will show: "Several redundant churches in the diocese of Bevindon have already been made available for use by Moslems, Hindus, and Buddhists, and one for cannibal animists from the interior of New Guinea, in case any immigrants of that denomination should appear in the area. . . . The Bishop's one stipulation is that all these churches, whatever other faiths they may be adapted for, must include a 'family planning' and vasectomy unit. This has led to what Dr Trellis calls a 'temporary log-jam' in his open-ended discussions with Dr Habib Ziftikharullah, the Chief Imam of Bevindon, himself the father of 27 bonny children. . . ."

That same year the Church of England decided that bishops should be compulsorily retired at 70. Dr Spaceley-Trellis, who still has a good many years to go, supported this, supplementing it with an even more far-reaching suggestion of his own. "Above all," he said in a sermon, "this is an age for Youth, and never has Youth been so clear-eyed, so compassionate and so committed as it is today. Progressive theologians have felt for some time that the present God lacks social awareness. He has failed to give a clear lead, for instance, on the problem of racialism. When, if ever, has he stood up and been counted with the rest of us on the question of South Africa? He is out of touch with current trends. His attitudes on such vital questions as housing, censorship, the sexual revolution, the environment and, above all, the Women's Liberation Movement have been unsatisfactory, to say the least. Altogether He gives the impression of being far too preoccupied with outmoded eternal matters—often tinged with élitism—which mean little or nothing to the ordinary man and woman of today. Some of us are beginning to feel it is high time He retired and made way for a younger man. . . ."

EVEN DR TRELLIS HAS SELDOM GIVEN such a clear statement of his creed, at once succinct and far-ranging. Never, perhaps, has he based his theological position more firmly. Through the years he has never faltered in his efforts, in his own words, "to drag the Church kicking and screaming into the 20th century"—whether as a representative of the Church Militant in the true sense (he has suggested that the Church should not be satisfied with supplying arms to "freedom fighters" in Southern Africa but should form its own military forces against the White régimes, armed, if necessary with nuclear weapons) or as a domestic reformer. His own cathedral, basically a 14th-century Gothic structure which, though out of keeping with everything he stands for, cannot (he admits) be totally demolished for "touristic" reasons, is now, with its computerised services and electronic furnishings, a "powerhouse of secular religion for this day and age."

THE BISHOP OF BEVINDON is now 60. He is, in every sense of the word, a Churchman of the 20th century. He is no "Prince of the Church", rather a Supreme Welfare Officer, who (in his own open-ended words) is "dedicated to the initiation of an open-ended, compassionate, committed, and deeply meaningful dialogue which will be relevant to the needs of Man in a secular age—regardless of class, race, colour, creed, mammalian, reptilian, or botanical species."

Where (to use the demotic language of his own Bevindon New Testament) does he go from here? To what eminence (even the Supreme Eminence) of the Church Ecumenical, Humanist, Secular, Managerial and Universal may he not aspire! The 20th century has only 24 years to run.

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Column

ONE DOES NOT come away from the exhibition *Young Writers of the Thirties* at the National Portrait Gallery in Trafalgar Square with any very strong feeling that it has added very much to what we know about the writers in question—Auden, Day Lewis, Isherwood. MacNeice and Spender—or about the period which saw the beginnings of their literary careers. Partly, perhaps, this is because the exhibition makes no attempt at a critical assessment of the writers or their works, and this being so there really does not seem to be much point in presenting the exhibition at this particular moment. One has a very strong sense of *déjà vu*, but only in the quite literal sense that one really has seen it all before. As one wanders round the gallery and gazes at the photographs which look back at one somewhat repetitively from the walls, it is almost impossible not to wonder what the point of the whole thing is. One has the feeling of turning the pages of some old family photograph album, from which all life and interest have vanished except to the elderly relatives of the deceased.

The organisers of the exhibition might quite fairly say that such criticism is unjust because they have stated their purpose quite plainly in their rather inadequate guide and catalogue. The objective of the exhibition, they say, is "an extension of our aim in the permanent display: to show a number of great writers in relation to each other, and in the context of their literary achievements." But this really tells one very little; rather, it tends to make one doubt the entire fabric of assumptions which have inspired the exhibition. *Great* writers? Of these five, only Auden has any claim to greatness, and it is a genuine one. MacNeice and Isherwood were very good writers. Both Day Lewis and Spender could be good on occasions, but the quality of their works is so uneven, more particularly in the period with which this exhibition is concerned, that only a very limited part of it remains of value. Yet a casual visitor to the exhibition, however eager to learn and discriminate, might well leave under the impression that all five writers here concerned were equally deserving of his respect and admiration and without any sense whatever that there were very wide variations in the degree of their talent.

Nor indeed would he gain any inkling of it from the photographs which look back at him from the walls, whose subjects seem to have some shared characteristic which is at once hauntingly familiar and yet at the same time tantalisingly difficult to identify. *What is it that they have in common?* one keeps asking oneself. It is certainly no physical likeness; yet where have I seen it all before?

And then suddenly the answer strikes one. These are the faces of English middle-class public schoolboys and undergraduates, cheerful, fresh-faced and boyish, with an engaging air of innocence and youth, as one has seen them a thousand times before in group photographs of school and college societies, rowing clubs, tennis parties, climbing expeditions, young men whose experience has been foreshortened, as it were, by the cloistered nature of their upbringing, and with a slightly Peter Pan sense that life is an awfully big adventure. They are the faces that show us the Class of 1930, and one almost looks for the One Most Likely to Succeed. The single exception is MacNeice, who though indeed he shared with the others the same upbringing and education, was a Celt, a man from the bogs, with something about him which was alien, aloof, withdrawn; with his faintly Spanish profile he gazes in these photographs either at his companions or at the visitor with a slightly fastidious, disdainful look, as if somewhere there were a bad smell about.

THE EXHIBITION thus has the disconcerting effect of vividly, almost physically, impressing on one how deeply and ineradicably marked these young writers were by their class and environmental origins, and these marks clung to them like the smell of blood to Lady Macbeth's hands; not all the perfumes of Arabia, nor any immersion, partial or total, in the cause of the proletariat could wash the stain of them away, however much they wished that this was possible. For in greater or lesser degree, these young writers regarded their intimate relationship with the English society of which they were the heirs and successors as evidence of original sin, and during the Thirties much of their life and work was devoted to trying to escape from it and if possible to destroy it. They wished to discover some state of prelapsarian grace in which they would be innocent of the consequences of the fall.

For the society of which they were so unmistakably the product was in their eyes an incurably sick society, and they carried the symptoms of its sickness within themselves. What then should they do to be saved? They were like the rich young man who asked Christ the same question; and though they did not quite give themselves the same answer as Christ gave him, rather indeed they shared a quite remarkable ability to advance their own literary

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and commercial interests, neither did they go sadly away, for whatever the right answer was it was evident to them that the poor came into it somewhere, though exactly where was not quite clear. What, on the whole, they were fairly certain about was that their own fate and that of the poor were inextricably bound up with each other, and that neither could achieve a state of grace, dignity, and health without the help of the other. But how was such a state of mutual aid to be achieved? To this question they had no real answer of their own, for one of their troubles was that they really knew nothing about the poor, and by no leap of the imagination could bridge the abyss which divided them. All they knew was that something ought to be done for them, and nothing could be done for the poor without destroying or at the very least profoundly modifying the sick society of which they were both, in their different ways, the victims.

THE EXHIBITION illustrates the identity of interest which the young writers established, or tried to establish, between themselves, who were so privileged, and those who inhabited the lower depths of society, by showing them against a background of industrial England in decay: of rotting slums and idle factories, of hunger marchers demonstrating, of unemployed miners scrabbling in the slag heaps for the fuel to heat their homes. And this is quite right, because such images played a large part in the thoughts, the anxieties, and the poems of the young writers. Together they composed a sort of sinister hinterland which the young writers felt it their duty to describe and explore and, not less, to transform into the kind of England of which they dreamed—a peaceful land of gentleness and mutual affection in which human beings are accorded the dignity which by their very nature they deserve, and rejoice in the results which flow from the natural love of man for man. They saw England as if it had been laid under a curse by sinister and evil powers and felt it their duty to release it from their spell.

This is all very well, but the juxtaposition of a group of young, fresh-faced boyish idealists and the background of a sick and decaying society presents altogether too simple a version of the relationship between them, which was in many ways a highly complicated and ambivalent one. For one thing, it begs the question whether England was in fact the kind of society they believed it to be. But it also overlooks the fact that these young men were not only animated by sympathy with the condition of the poor and oppressed; they were also highly ambitious writers, deeply concerned with the problems of their art and craft, and it was never very clear whether there were any satisfactory means of reconciling these different, and sometimes conflicting interests. Nor was it by any means certain that the poor and oppressed who so engaged the young men's sympathies were really the kind of people they supposed them to be, and were required to be if they were to play their allotted part in the young men's political mythology, and for this reason as the decade advanced there increasingly crept into their work an element of illusion and self-deception which today makes much of it ring false and hollow.

THE EXHIBITION, in fact, provokes rather more questions than it is able to answer; or even to suggest ways of answering. If one really wishes to see these writers, as the catalogue says, "in their relation to each other, and in the context of their literary achievements", one does much better to read Professor Samuel Hynes's admirable book, *The Auden Generation*.[1] Given the material at present available to scholars, it is unlikely that any better book on the subject will be written for some time to come, though of course it is possible that other critics may quarrel with Professor Hynes's assessment of this particular generation's achievements.

The dust-jacket of Professor Hynes's book is illustrated by a photograph of Auden, Isherwood and Spender, bright-eyed, beaming and euphoric, which exactly confirms the impression made by its companion pieces in the exhibition. Spender, centre, and at least a head taller, is flanked right and left by Auden and Isherwood; he looks exactly like a triumphant cricket captain, after a successful Test series, posing for the press with his two devastating young fast bowlers. But Professor Hynes, unlike the exhibition, helps us to understand this slightly disconcerting photograph. For, as he says, the Thirties as we think of them today did not really begin in 1930; history is not so neatly compartmented. In 1930, and even two years later, we were really still in the last flickering golden glow of the 1920s; and these three young men might perhaps be best regarded as left-wing deviants from Evelyn Waugh's Bright Young Things, with whom they had much in common.

What they had most in common was the conviction, ultimately derived perhaps from *The Waste Land*, the most influential single English poem of this century, that Western civilisation was sick unto death, and the only thing to do

[1] *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s.* By SAMUEL HYNES. The Bodley Head, £6.50.

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was to mourn or alternatively to dance at its funeral feast; if one chose to dance, it was none the less a *danse macabre*. The rejection of their own society which characterised the Auden generation was in no way, though they sometimes liked to think so, the result of a political or economic analysis; it was rather an emotional and cultural reaction against a civilisation which had met with catastrophe as a result of the First World War. In many respects they saw themselves as the heirs and successors of the soldier poets and writers, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, Lawrence of Arabia who, when the world was falling to pieces around them, revolted against the follies and sins of their fathers, the Old Men who were responsible for the war, yet somehow contrived to be heroes as well as writers, and survived the Great Test with courage, honour and literary integrity untarnished. How to achieve this in their own day was a problem which much concerned them.

Professor Hynes brilliantly describes the position of these young men, who, at the beginning of the Thirties, and of their own literary careers, were poised almost exactly midway in an age of *entre deux guerres* and he analyses with great intelligence and sensibility the intense pressures exercised on them as much by the past and the future as by the present. One of the best of Spender's early poems begins:

> *Who live under the shadow of a war*
> *What can I do that matters?*

There can be little doubt, I imagine, that Spender was thinking of the war that was to come, and it is a tribute to his percipience that he foresaw its approach so clearly at a time when most people would have dismissed such a possibility as poetic fantasy. But he might just as well have been writing of the war that was already over; the shadow was thrown forward from the past as well as thrown backward from the future.

IN THIS RESPECT the young poets of the Thirties could very rightly have claimed to be representative of their generation in a way which few others have been. But this consciousness of standing between two catastrophes, of which one was still in the womb of time, introduced into their writing an element of ambiguity which, however hard they tried, they were never really able to dispose of. If one accepts the five writers of the National Portrait Gallery exhibition as the representative figures of the Auden generation, one is struck by how hard they struggled to achieve, or to invent, some posture, pose, stance, attitude, whatever one may choose to call it, which would enable them to reconcile their commitment to literature with the responses which the pressures of the time increasingly demanded of them. Those who came off best were those who, like MacNeice and Isherwood, succeeded in maintaining some kind of distance between themselves and the events of their times, and this gave them a kind of confidence and assurance even when times were at their worst. It was as if they had something within them which was nobody else's business.

Those came off worse, who, like Day Lewis and Spender, for reasons in which guilt, hope, compassion and a feeling for the brotherhood of man were equally intermingled, for a time sacrificed their literary integrity to a political cause of which they knew little and understood less. But it is worth noting that in their flirtation with Communism they never achieved the kind of total commitment of which Brecht for instance was capable, and in their efforts to publicise, propagandise, poeticise their cause were never able to create a work of art like Brecht's *Die Massnahme*. But then Brecht really knew what he was talking about.

As for Auden, he was so much a man for all seasons that any posture was welcome to him if he could make poetry out of it. As Professor Hynes says, he wrote parables from which we can draw what conclusions we like, only after reading them we will know better how to draw them. Only on occasions even his Protean nature failed him. The last verses of one of his most famous poems, "Spain", end with the repeated refrain: *But today the struggle!* Only it was a struggle strictly for others, in which Auden had not the slightest intention of taking part; and the refrain, coming after the magnificent opening verses, reads as if a great poet had suddenly been transformed into the most ordinary of political demagogues.

R

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John Fuller

Spirals
179_

. . . and so I still hold up my head as
Far as the stiffness of my neck allows
And the dead weight of this nightcap worn to warm
A hairless head in pitiless November,
Still prefer no man's reason to my own
And say so readily at all times, yet
To you, my Friend, whose pie we have consumed
In this my humble lodging with much wine
Trod in a Golden Age it seems, afterwards
Shipped while the unhappy Monarch still
Retained his head (though little else, the Palace
Lately stormed), to you, I say, I owe
Apology. I have no cellars for
Your complots, as neither for such old Bordeaux!
My steps (you counted them?) go up, not down.
But I am flattered to be sought like this,
A Patriot still, I do admit, and somewhat known
In greenness for a pert Republican
With little good to say for King or Church.
Although (and here perhaps I'll let you smile)
You found me dozing with my feet in mustard,
Fingers a-twitch upon this folio
That has not left my knee in all this time,
Open at Exodus, a coffin's size.
You did not think I dined on Holy Writ,
Yet pastry crumbs have lodged between the pages,
A serviceable table for your kindness,
With gravy on these very words of God
That I was reading when you first came in:
"My face shall not be seen." A daunting text!
Well, I am not ashamed. A text is not
A Bishop. Bishops, alas, may still be seen.
And God who fed his prophets will not grudge
An old philosopher a slice or two.
Yes, I am flattered that I have a name
Still worthy to be added to those others
Proscribed by our mad frighted Government
Who will, I know, persistently confuse
The speculatist and incendiary:
Priestley, you say? No, Priestley is not here.
Hardy? Thelwall? Holcroft? John Horne Tooke?
Whom some, I dare say, can admire. Brave men!

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They are not exiled by the mob to spend
Their latter days beside a pretty water
That links the Catskills to long Chesapeake.
You say a thousand warrants are made out:
It seems to me that that is quite enough.
Forgive me to have ate the pie and now
Decline your ardent wish, but I was glad
To talk awhile with you and hear the news
Of the arrests and pamphlets, and the Trial
Of Reason soon to be attempted by
Our tailed and cloven-footed Ministers,
Happy not least, like them, with meat and crust!
If I had straight declined, my fast had not
Been so agreeably broken, I dare say.
You will forgive me then, my dear old Friend?
I do not think that Reason will succumb
Unless it be starved out, and who would rule
A land of corpses? I have kept this frame
Barely alive, but living is enough.
I shall not bargain for the people's bread
Or play the Law out like a shining fish,
Nor willingly would you rely upon
A dotard careless of all petty woes
By mankind self-inflicted, weak in arm,
Dreaming of secrets never to be shared
With idle cobblers and orators.
What, shall the rabble have my ear? Rather
My stone, my toe, or my incontinence.
I'd hang upon your project as on Sinbad
Hung the old man of the sea, a parasite,
Unfed, uncertain and unpunctual,
Except perhaps in being thus confined
To one known spot, the window as you see
Target for halfpence, highest from the street.
(I've papered up the cracks, though, and have here
A chamber nearly full for my revenge.)
And why should men thus listen to their fellows
In times when misery distorts their tongues,
When hunger lends the fraudulent excuse
For violence, and truth's apprentice to
Expediency? In the best of times
It is a curious journey, hard and long,
And simply wishing will not get us there.
We shall not reach that eminence alone
Though each must find the pathway for himself
Nor help his brother to it with a gun.
Your cellared muskets keep their messages
Only for what they puncture: from the lips
Of the unsmiling dead their ignorance
Escapes and becomes the spirit they surrendered
To all the simple hungers, much too late.
How is the spirit nourished and repaired

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But by the influence of natural objects,
The steady state of Nature shining out
As does a candle in a mine, small scope
Yet pure of subterranean artisans?
My own researches tell me all the time
That what we see assists us to see more,
Little by little, though the whole is dark.
As God proclaimed: "My face shall not be seen."
And what we try to see, precious beyond
The greed of governments, may not be taxed,
Stolen, corrupted, forfeited or lost.
We'll have an illustration: here's a flame
Teetering on its tower of mutton-fat.
Look for a moth. The room is full of them,
And those that are not burnt or webbed will fly
Towards it, sure as our planet hugs the sun.
There, you see? Ah no, I fear you didn't.
The sluggish jelly moves too slowly in
Its pulleys of gristle. I have plans to make
Some kind of swift mechanic eye, with plates
Of silver turning in darkness on a wheel.
No more of that, but closely watch the moth.
Its Path is indirect and spirals inwards,
Not equably as Archimedes' spiral
(A cylinder coiled up) but plunging closer in
As Descartes found, the vector angles round
The pole proportional to logarithms
Of the successive radii (the coil
Of elephant's trunk, since roughly conical).
You're with me? Still looking for the dazzled moth
Or for your claret? The quickness of the wing
Deceives the eye. I know it works with snails,
Whose tracks at night observe the rising moon.
These creatures do not look ahead of them
But seek a light they see somewhat abeam,
Adjusting their path continually to
This constant angle. So it is with Man
And his poor spiritual illumination,
Sought not directly but with reason like
The snail or moth, plunging at last to truth!
The time's not now, and will not come just yet.
The mind moves slowly in its glistening track
With all appearance of obliquity,
Requiring Gods with appetites or with
The heads of fish; worshipping any shape
That fear dictates or custom renders dear,
The totem's beak, the bosom of the hills,
Even the commonest odd-toed ungulate;
Requiring weakly to be led, to scrape
The forehead at the shrines, to guard the secret.
The secret's in our hands! At least in mine,
I'm sure of it, and I'm familiar with

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Its teasing shape, whether in text or shell.
You will remember, Friend, our youthful scorn
Of the confusions of these mosaic texts
And our analysis, as of a star,
Of the emergence of the single God
Unhappy in his fable as in a cloister
(There is no word in Hebrew for a Goddess).
We wished him married for morality
And for his greater piece of mind. Poor jest
Of riggish youth! Oh yes, I might still grant
That YHWH bears a cruel resemblance to
The Babylonian YA, yet in this shape
He brought to men (significantly closer
As in a geometrical progression)
A truth, the flame and centre of the whorl.
My years of study in philosophy
(The prism and the forms of animals,
My struggle with fossils, even my lost decade
Of gases) reveal to me the pattern of
What in our youth we scorned. My theory
Explains in a sense why Moses is neither king,
General, priest, prophet or magician,
But simply one of the constant angles of
Our spiral quest. When God said: "Thou shalt see
My back parts; but my face shall not be seen",
What was it but a recognition of
Our spiral-equiangular of truth,
The snail's way, the moth's way, and ours?
We see the back parts, sure enough, as did
He in the blinkered cleft: a passing glory
Which is to our poor eyes the shadow of time
Upon the world itself, the hem of Nature.
  And I have seen the vision, too, myself,
Seen it askance, obliquely like the snail.
You'd hear of it before you go? You're kind
To humour me. There is not much to tell,
Though it was that which changed my life, or else
I would not put you off so easily
My blood now being cooled but pumping still
To serve my will with steady revolution.
You knew my patron gave me the wherewithal
To take my passage on the *Adventurer*
And catalogue the fauna of the voyage?
We'd parted months before, you to collect
Subscriptions for another journal, which
I now forget, and I to Charmouth for
The fossils. It was the year of broad-arsed Bridget
And the hackney feats. Which year was that, I wonder?
I have no head for years. We sailed from Bristol.
Long months of patient work. Hot sun, bad food.
Then we were wrecked, most unexpectedly:
Some business with an anchor and some rocks

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Which blame could never fully clarify
Though later a whole bench of admirals
Sifted our testimony. The ship sank
And we were thrown upon the southern sand,
My cabinet upended and its trays,
The spiralled Nautilus, the Conch
And other specimens rejoining their
Own world, as I now feared I never would.
I nearly lost an eye, this breach from cheek
To scalp so longed to bare my dizzy skull.
Most sank. Many were beached already dead.
We mouthed in silence with our blackened tongues
Till one, the meanest deck-hand, found a fruit
That loosened his, and spoke in measured speech.
  And so we walked each one despite our wounds,
Mine not the greatest, though the pain was deep,
Till we came to the very nape of the mountain where
They lay so thick a blind man could have picked,
Moving his hands over the abundant sprays
Like a saint blessing the heads of children. One
With his guitar (all that remained unsmashed)
Plucked from its waist a sort of minuet
Which with its strictness mocked his purple mouth,
Lent it a smile which all of us returned
Who were not sleeping. The sounds moved over the trees
As shepherds wakeful on the Cotswold pastures,
Nudging the birds from soporific perches
To fan their colours in the glades and lodge
Again when the music ceased. I was still curious,
And reached the peak with all my pain forgotten.
And there it happened. Do not ask me what.
I cannot say what it was. Each footstep stirred
A melancholy shriek from vines that trailed
Up a cathedral's height to a green mist,
And drifting down were scattered veils of light.
I did not doubt the benevolence of that
Untrodden place. We lived. And were five years
Upon the island, where every shape betrayed
The trailing hem of Nature. Nothing was asked,
Nothing vouchsafed which I could learn or teach
In the ways of men. You were not there, my Friend,
And well may smile and shake your threatened head
(A thousand warrants surely cover *you*?).
Then you may die and feel that it is noble
To take us to the brink of civil war
To break a Bishop or a King or two.
May be I have become a misanthrope
And see no future in the race, and yet
I have my work and it is noble, too,
Though reaching beyond the human, vainly perhaps
As these poor daughters of the ransomed earth
Wooing the sons of heaven. . . .

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NOTES & TOPICS

Ill Fares the Welfare State

A European Balance—By DAVID MOLLER

FOR CENTURIES, enlightened Europeans have dreamed of a world in which all would be spared the full misery of hunger, homelessness, unemployment, sickness or a destitute old age. Such concern has undoubtedly helped create a happier and more humane Western society. Nevertheless, today the welfare dream is turning into a nightmare. For extensive and elaborate programmes are no longer bringing significant relief to the really poor; more important, funds simply aren't available to meet soaring expectations. Already welfarism has pushed several nations deep into debt.

Consider these rising costs of our welfare states: In Austria, the annual deficit on the state pension fund amounted to over 12 billion schillings in 1974—almost twice as much as in 1969. In West Germany, the cost of medical insurance benefits has nearly tripled in the last five years. In France, the annual deficit on the social security budget at the end of 1976 is expected to rise to almost 10 billion francs. In Denmark, taxes for welfare now swallow up some 35% of the average wage-earner's income. In Britain, the deficit on publicly-subsidised housing has risen by 1,000% in the last decade to an annual £1,500 million. In the Netherlands, social spending has doubled in 13 years to 20·4% of national income and now amounts to 43 billion guilders.

The welfare crisis has recently been made worse by inflation and unemployment. With lengthening dole queues, fewer workers have been struggling under an ever heavier tax load. Yet even when good times return, it is now clear that welfarism cannot continue in its old ways. Citizens have simply reached the limits of taxability and even left-of-centre politicians recognise that, without welfare cuts, current inflationary programmes could push some nations over that line dividing liberal democracy from state collectivism.

In Britain, where the welfare budget has quadrupled in 25 years and now accounts for a third of all public spending, the Labour Government's Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, has warned that his country has already been brought "close to one of the frontiers of social democracy. . . . I don't want all of us, or the majority of people in this country, to be too dependent upon the the state and not enough dependent upon themselves."[1]

ON A RECENT TRIP THROUGH Europe, I found similar and growing concern. While no one I spoke to suggested the "dismantling" of the Welfare State, virtually all stressed the need for "a drastic overhaul." The burden of taxes and social security contributions is penalising effort, stifling initiative and starving industry of funds—yet an estimated 20 to 30 million Europeans remain locked in grim and hopeless penury.

What has gone wrong?

TO SOME EXTENT, WELFARISM is the victim of progress. As medicine has grown more sophisticated, its costs have skyrocketed. With health and social advances, many are living longer (and medical costs of the elderly are 70% above the general average); since the birth rate has also fallen, the old now form a rapidly growing section in many communities. In West Germany, for example, the proportion of people over 65

[1] Others on the Left, however, still refuse to see the point. Recently (8 June 1976) Michael Foot, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, told a gathering of local government officers, "Extending public expenditure is one of the principal ways in which we can extend the benefits and advantages of socialism to great sections of the community."

In February 1976, Miss Joan Lestor MP resigned as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary with a defiant "We are the party of public expenditure!"

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compared with those in the 15–64 age bracket has soared by 50% in the period 1953–1973. Since retirement ages have been steadily lowered, pensions now take a hefty chunk of social security benefits: in Luxembourg as much as 57%. With more extensive education, the working population has declined still further. In the Netherlands, every 100 workers must now support 194 non-workers.[2]

Yet Welfarism also suffers mammoth problems of its own creation. For a start, it is now trying to do far too much. Originally established to tackle serious but well-defined hardships—hunger, disease, destitution—it has gradually assumed the sweeping powers of a cradle-to-grave nursemaid. (In West Germany, a recent official pamphlet giving citizens a "simplified" version of their social rights ran to 300 pages!).[3] Given the state of most public accounting, no one any longer knows *exactly* what Welfarism is trying to do—or how much it costs. We do know, however, that crucial needs have often been neglected for programmes that are possibly desirable but by no means essential. Here are just a few samples.

The French state devotes an annual 198 million francs on spa treatment for 300,000 citizens. Yet according to a recent, official report, 16 million French people—more than a quarter of the population—live in sub-standard housing without either indoor washing or toilet facilities. In Italy one public organisation spent 12 billion lire in 1975 on sending some 300,000 people to its spas. Meanwhile, Italy's seriously ill languish in some of Europe's most scandalously overcrowded hospitals. And each winter overcrowding reaches crisis levels as thousands of old people are forced into hospitals through appalling housing conditions.

In fact, many lavish and peripheral programmes have been launched under the banner of "welfare." In Britain, public authorities erect palatial leisure centres, squash courts, sauna baths, Olympic-size swimming pools and artificial ski slopes. Yet doctors continue to operate in Dickensian surroundings: many of our mentally ill are housed in converted workhouses. Of 2,750 hospitals, it is estimated that only 80 have been built since 1945 and beds are so scarce that a permanent waiting list of 500,000 patients queue an average of six months for non-urgent surgery.[4] Worse, an estimated one in ten of Britain's pensioners subsists below the poverty line.

WELFARISM'S SECOND MAJOR FAULT has been its lack of "discrimination", or carefully targeted priorities. Instead of concentrating scarce funds on those in greatest need, it has often squandered them in "universal" but meagre benefits for one and all. Belgium and France devote more than 15% of their social security budgets to family allowances. But they go to families of all incomes. As Lionel Stoleru, French Secretary of State for Labour Affairs, has said, "Family allowances have often simply transferred money from single people to families rather than from the rich to the poor. . . ."[5]

Indiscriminate housing subsidies do little to tackle homelessness and overcrowding. In Britain, an annual £1,500 million investment enables public-housing tenants to pay an average of just 42% of true housing costs.[6] In London, the figure is as low as 32%, and when maintenance and management charges are taken into account it would even pay to give many houses away.

[2] See: *Vision, the European Business Magazine* (Paris), May 1976.

[3] The Swedes are no less thorough and generous. As *Time* has reported (7 June 1976, p.8), ". . . benefits are also high. The $11,250-a-year worker would get $10,205 if he fell sick, and when he retires, he will get $8,726. Once a year, moreover, every Swede receives in the mail a bright red "social catalogue", which details all the wondrous possibilities that the state affords its people. In alphabetical order, it begins with *abort* (abortion), which can be had for a minimal fee but must have official approval after the twelfth week of pregnancy. It ends with *överklaga* (complaints).

[4] In its article on the Swedish Welfare State, *Time* (7 June) reported: ". . . the cost of the medical programme alone quintupled in the decade from 1960 to '70, and now, with the addition of dental-care costs, runs to $7·3 billion a year, or nearly $1,000 per man, woman and child.

"To keep costs down, authorities use the queue system to artificially reduce the demand for medical service. As a reader complained in a letter to Stockholm's Liberal newspaper. *Expressen:* "My father is waiting for a hip operation at Eskilstuna Lasarett. His every step is a torture. Three hundred cases are on the waiting list, and they only do one hip operation a week." This example is repeated all over Sweden. It can take up to two months to get an appointment to see a doctor, and such visits average about ten minutes. Referral to a specialist often takes two years, and the wait for elective surgery can take five years. For dental emergencies, Stockholm has only one clinic, operated by three dentist-and-nurse teams. The average wait is four hours. Ironically, the 10% of Swedish doctors who have elected to maintain private practices frequently choose to limit the number of patients they will take. Reason: the government sets a maximum on the amount of public health insurance funds that these doctors can collect, and many simply stop working when they have earned the limit.

"An even bigger trouble is that the system can lead to bad medicine, because of either hasty treatment or inadequately trained staffs. A recent official study covering a one-week period showed that 414 operations at 27 hospitals had been performed by residents with less than one year's experience".

[5] See Lionel Stoleru, *Vaincre la Pauvreté dans les Pays Riches* (Flammarion, Paris, 1974).

[6] The Catholic Aid Society's pamphlet, "Do We Need Council Houses?"

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But doesn't subsidised housing help the poor? Not necessarily. One recent British survey showed that the richest third of those families living in public housing had higher total earnings than the poorest third of families buying their own homes. Inevitably, the main victims of such anomalous largesse are those four million Britons still trapped in vile, crumbling ghettos because housing funds have run dry.

Incredibly, some welfare benefits tend to discriminate in favour of the *rich*. In many European countries, state pensions are based on previous earnings—up to 80% in Italy. Yet many regard the provision of graduated pensions as the function of private insurance, *not* the welfare state. Since in most countries, the well-paid's higher social-security contributions simply don't create the extra wealth later needed to meet their higher pensions, many affluent retired people now enjoy an unfairly large share of *national* resources—at the expense of the poor. As Giancarlo Mazzocchi, an economics professor at Milan's Catholic University, sadly told me, "In some respects, our welfare systems are now doing the exact opposite of their original, humane goals. . . ."

THE OPEN-ENDED OFFER of allegedly "free" medicine has simply encouraged consumption. Indeed, both doctors and patients have expected too much of our medical systems. With the lack of independent medical audits, most European physicians have had too little incentive for restricting expensive treatment, forgoing sophisticated gadgetry, or shortening hospital stays. In West Germany, costs at hospitals have in fact risen by more than 300% in the last five years. As Dr Horst Schmidt, Social Affairs Minister for the West German state of Hesse, told me, "Doctors should take into account that the costs of staff, equipment and hospital beds must be borne by those who are covered by medical insurance schemes."

Since medical costs have not hit their pockets *directly*, many patients have made excessive demands on doctors' time and bombarded them with requests for pills, lotions, tonics, heat treatment, and thermal cures; and overworked doctors have too often given in. The main result has been an alarming over-prescription of drugs; in several countries, some 10% of citizens now regularly rely on sleeping pills.[7]

In France, which consumes a world-record $2·5 billion worth of drugs a year, one recent report cited the ailing citizen who in the course of one day obtained 152 different boxes and bottles of medicines. One anti-pill campaigner, Dr Henri Pradal, has pointed out that "drug-induced illness accounts for up to 25% of hospital admissions." (Ironically, the figure would be even higher if 40% of drugs prescribed in France did not end up in the dustbin!)

LIKE MOST ARMS OF Government, Welfarism has developed a vast and expensive bureaucracy. Since many systems grew up piecemeal—to tackle different social problems for different professional groups—some countries have inherited a mass of agencies. France has different types of social security coverage for miners, farmers, seamen, railwaymen, civil servants, gas and electricity workers. West Germany has 1,500 official sickness insurance organisations; Italy an estimated 20,000 public welfare agencies (some insuring against specific ailments for one particular profession!)

Yet even those countries with unified administrations have recruited on a massive scale. Denmark now has more than 500,000 welfare-service employees—roughly a fifth of the nation's work-force—and their wages absorb some 75% of all welfare spending. Recently, one welfare home for juvenile delinquents boasted 38 staff, and just two "clients"; as one Danish industrialist pointed out, "Private business would have simply closed down that particular subsidiary. . . ."

Welfare systems have been uncannily adept at deploying expensive manpower into the wrong or non-existent jobs. In Britain, the number of health-service administrators has nearly doubled to 80,000 in the last decade. Since the health service budget is obviously finite, some hospitals have had to do without essential staff. But as the *British Medical Journal* has put it, "Does it make sense for hospitals to have to try to function with only half or two-thirds of their establishment of nurses while administrative offices are full?" Because of doctor shortages junior hospital staff have been forced to work for up to 120 hours a week—or worse, to emigrate. Not surprisingly, the number of emigrating doctors has doubled in the last five years to 1,000 a year.

In Italy, I visited overflowing hospitals where wards had been closed for up to three years—for lack of nurses—while nearby health administration offices teemed with staff. The shortage of technicians to process X-rays and laboratory tests means that Italians spend nearly twice as long in hospital as the European average of ten to 12 days.

ABOVE ALL, BUREAUCRATIC OBESITY can foul up or slow down decision-taking. When surgeons on Britain's Humberside recently tried to find

[7] See: *Abuse of Medicines* (Report by a Working Party), Council of Europe, European Public Health Committee (Strasbourg, January 1975).

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out why they couldn't get the correct screws for setting broken bones, they uncovered 11 different channels for ordering equipment.

In France, I heard of several new hospitals that were standing empty. Why? Because they had either been built where they were not really needed or there were insufficient funds to staff them. Last year, one watchdog organisation revealed that the health insurance system had hired 12,000 extra staff and spent FF218 million on a national computer network that, four years after installation, was handling less than 2% of its possible work-load—"apparently, in another four years' time, the system will be working well. But by then, the computers themselves will be out of date." And for several despairing seconds, my doctor informant buried his head in his hands.

Yet I never really grasped the stultifying effects of welfare bureaucracy until I visited one Italian pensions office. Occupying all 19 floors of a giant Milan skyscraper, this human anthill had dreamed up over 140 different counters for old people to queue at and created so much mounting paperwork that piles of it were simply stacked on tables in odd corners of the building. Everywhere there were crowds of tired and confused pensioners whose taxes had helped erect the edifice. It came as no surprise when I was told of one Italian who had waited for a war pension, for 31 years.

EVEN MORE DISTURBING is the growing tyranny of some welfare systems. For over the years, the paternalistic promise that "the State will provide" has gradually hardened into the authoritarian insistence that "the State knows best." Throughout Europe, public authorities have poured taxpayers' money into housing projects, yet too rarely produced dwellings that most taxpayers want (*i.e.*, small homes with back gardens).

Too often, they have flattened homely, horizontal slums to erect grim vertical ones.[8] Despite the growing evidence of the misery, loneliness, and vandalism caused by high-rise living, housing departments have continued to build drab gardenless tower blocks for often minimal space savings. (Residential buildings need a certain amount of space between them for daylight.) Even in spacious Sweden, nearly a half of new housing consists of largely unwanted high-rise flats. As the Danish MP Bertel Haarder told me, "Once the bureaucratic machine has been programmed to produce certain goods, it is seemingly impossible to bring it to a halt. . . ."

[8] One European retreat from tall buildings began in June 1976 when UK Environment Secretary Peter Shore admitted (at the United Nations' Habitat conference in Vancouver) that, "Even in inner city areas [tower blocks] create more problems than they solve. . . ."

In Britain, public authorities have used powers of compulsory purchase to buy out homeowners, then demolished whole streets to make way for expensive but heavily-subsidised blocks of flats. Often houses could have been renovated for a fraction of the cost. Not long ago, an official survey revealed that 60% of 91,000 homes destroyed in London in a recent four-year period had been in "good" or "fair" condition. "Those who have been dispossessed of their homes", one Labour MP admitted to me, "now feel as embittered and helpless as might citizens behind the Iron Curtain."

Taxpayers are also being dragooned into large, unwanted hospitals. Over the years, the Danes have built up a series of small, excellent hospitals that are near patients' homes and can handle most complaints. (Only 3% of patients need specialised equipment.) Yet many of these intimate institutions—some only 25 years old—are being bulldozed to ensure a "good bed-occupancy" in the new medical factories.

Indeed, one of Europe's most striking monuments to runaway paternalism is the brand-new, £136 million, 564-bed Herlev Hospital outside Copenhagen. (In the U.S.A., Los Angeles's new 1,120-bed Cedars Sinai Medical Center was a comparative bargain at £55 million.) A gleaming, white, concrete fairy palace, with luxury-hotel fittings, marble floors and strident, pop-art colour scheme, Herlev is a living embodiment of doctors' and architects' wildest dreams. Before equipping the hospital, a team of administrators scoured Europe, the United States and Japan for ideas. They then installed a mass of electronic gadgetry that includes a contraption for dragging away and sterilising *entire* hospital beds. But having spent one million kroner on just 178 king-size, therapeutic beds, staff then discovered they couldn't get them into the wards because the doorways were too narrow. (They are now gathering dust in a nearby hospital's basement.) All in all, taxpayers' money was spent with such abandon that today the top nine floors of the main 25-storey skyscraper remain bare concrete.

SOMETIMES THE WELFARE STATE appears determined to clutch even the most unwilling citizens to its icy bosom. For instance, growing numbers of cosy, semi-private old people's homes in Denmark are being closed by the withdrawal of public grants to force hundreds of elderly into wholly state-run institutions of double the size—and double the public cost. As one Dane angrily told me, "Many of these old people had been promised that they could stay in their original institutions for the rest of their lives. The welfare state has become Big Brother. . . ."

All-embracing welfarism can lead to some

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curious situations. Scandinavia has excellent and extensive nursery facilities. But with staffing ratios as high as one teacher for every five youngsters they have added considerably to taxation. Many parents are thus virtually *forced* to use the facilities so that both can work to ease their tax load.

As a result, 45% of Danish children attend kindergarten from the age of three and 16% are sent to "cradle rooms" from birth. "More and more of our youngsters", says Danish MP Haarder, "now spend up to ten hours a day away from home and are thus being taught to function as a group, rather than as a family. This could have serious implications for the future. . . ."

POSSIBLY THE MOST ALARMING feature of our Welfare systems is that they might have become *too* successful in cushioning some people from life's misfortunes. In France the unemployed can receive 90% of previous earnings for up to a year; in Denmark for up to three and a half years. The jobless Dane can obtain additional funds for rent or mortgage, the instalment payments on his car and even his television set. Even the tolerant Swedes were taken aback when they recently heard of the indigent immigrant family that, soon after mastering Stockholm's system of state handouts, was able to buy two new cars.

The British welfare system has become such a jungle of anomalies that growing numbers of workless do better than low-paid workers. According to Conservative MP Ralph Howell, "It is now more profitable for those earning up to £70 a week to be unemployed for 15 weeks than work the full year."

Even those European countries with the best work-records are losing their edge. Both Sweden and the Netherlands now suffer industrial absenteeism of more than 10%.

Indeed, so far from enhancing the community's sense of social responsibility, there is disturbing evidence that comprehensive welfarism has done the very reverse. For as workers see more and more of their earnings melt away in taxes or social security contributions, some become determined to recoup some of their investment from the system—be it in medical care, sick leave, or welfare allowances. As one French industrialist told me, "Many employees no longer regard the paid sick leave as an insurance against misfortune but as their annual entitlement. . . ."

As the welfare burden of hiring labour grows heavier, more employers bend the rules. Each day, several thousand Dutch unemployment-beneficiaries pedal across the border to work at "black" jobs in Belgium and West Germany. In Italy, where employers have to meet more than half of their employees' total welfare costs, some 1·5 million jobs are held illegally—often in unhealthy or dangerous conditions. As Professor Mario Deaglio, an economic commentator and professor at the University of Turin, told me: "Industry in Italy is simply moving underground. . . ."

Above all, runaway Welfarism has made taxes soar. In Sweden—where welfare sops up one-third of all taxes—inspectors have levied demands of more than 100% on some income. This high-handed attitude has, in turn, promoted widespread tax evasion. I found Scandinavians, while still insisting on adequate care for the sick and the poor, now obsessively discussing the latest tax dodges. In Britain, *The Economist* recently commented, "Penal tax rates have created Britain's most profitable industry—tax avoidance."

Naturally, serious situations like the welfare mess produce extremist critics and radical crusaders. One of the more significant new voices is Mogens Glistrup, a rambunctious lawyer who leads Denmark's Progress Party. He prescribes massive reductions in the 700,000-strong Danish state officialdom and argues that the abolition of income tax—two-thirds of which is devoted to social spending—would mean that most welfare benefits would no longer be needed. Brandishing a sheet of minutely-detailed figures, he showed me how income tax could be switched to less constricting and lower taxes on consumption in exactly five years. "Then on June 23, 1981, we can put the income tax authority's papers on the traditional midsummer night's bonfires. . . ."

A few years ago, Glistrup might have been dismissed as just another Nordic eccentric. Today, he leads a party supported by 17% of Denmark's voters and with 24 seats in its 179-member Parliament. Indeed, aside from his zanier schemes for dismantling his country's defence forces and diplomatic service, Glistrup preaches a gospel that has an increasing appeal to hard-hit taxpayers all over Europe: "Most people believe in self-help. . . . They don't want to be fussed over or bullied by armies of social workers and bureaucrats. . . .[9] Deprived of less

(Cont'd on p. 64)

[9] On 3 October 1975, *The Times* carried a report by an Exeter University lecturer who had concluded that social workers might actually exacerbate some "baby-battering." Social workers "too often . . . treated the families not as full and equal citizens but as 'welfare cases' who were deprived or odd in some visible way. . . . But sooner or later the clients began to kick out against dishonesties and deceptions. They also often act out their rebellious anger with us on their children."

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European Notebook: . . . Telos

Telos

LET ME CALL my island "Telos", and happily my annual voyage there is difficult and complicated. First one has to land on another island, and only from there is there a ferry available to cross another bit of the sea. The ferry's schedule has proved over the years to be consistently unreliable; and this summer I learned, as if it were some dark Hellenic secret, that the journey would be made four, rather than three, times a week. Paradise has its little odd rules and regulations that one gladly puts up with. There is a place for an automobile (some of Telos' best beaches are several miles from the village), but how to go about reserving it remains a perennial Mediterranean mystery. Only one Athens travel agency knows anything about the intricacies of coming and going, and there appears to be a feud between mainland and island. After all, Telos has so little to offer. There is no "comfort", not to speak of "de luxe", unless one brings it along oneself on a yacht to be anchored in the port of Polaria. There is still a kind of Grand Hotel around, gently declining and falling for decades now; and its kitchen is, as Michelin used to say, "worth the journey". . . to any taverna on the sea or a souvlaki *stand in the village. . . .*

I meet from time to time somebody who has actually made it to Telos, heard them moan about the "miserable panorama" of a church and a cemetery on a bare hill: they know that, after all those other dozen islands on the Mediterranean Tour, nothing special is happening here. The single tiny village of the isle is perched almost inaccessibly on a hilltop, and coming from the port there is no way of knowing it is there (which must have discouraged all kinds of piratical raids over a thousand years). From the other side the view is sharp of the medieval castle and the monastery on the cliff side. When I stare at the picture of white squares and flat roofs I think of combinations of Mont St-Michel and Sidi Bou Said; but then one begins to register more and more the angular red-brick tops of the large new villas being built (after much struggle with planning permissions) by rich mainland Greeks, and each of them has at least three or four antennae protruding.

The village itself still remains something of a children's playground. Morning and evenings a dwarf-like village announcer shouts out the programme in the cinema and other important local events. The women spin and weave in the open doors of their houses (glimpses of lovely painted plates hanging on walls behind them); the old men string beads and pearls. The missing middle generation can all be found in Düsseldorf and the environs of the Ruhr, busy working and remitting. The flocks of sheep are guided by a few shepherds with marvellously crooked croziers, and the herds of wild goats seem to manage quite by themselves.

A handful of foreigners come here year after year, and a few have houses of their own through the connections of their Greek relatives. But wars and political crises inconveniently intervene to keep things as they were. All the old ferries were requisitioned for Saloniki during the Cyprus difficulties. But little is taken as tragic: except, possibly, that bewildered Telos soldier who happily returned home; but, with his raspberry-smeared face, was taken to be the first casualty of the Turkish invasion. The outside world doesn't seem quite real, and on the day the Junta fell in Athens one of the locals (who happens to be a French art-dealer) suggested that the old pictures and placards of the Colonels' régime be discreetly removed: "But not to worry, I've lunched regularly with Karamanlis in Paris. . . ."

And yet the place seems to be of some military importance, and it is no secret since the towers of the radar station can be easily seen by anyone; even a little military air-strip is being built. Curiously bearded young Dutchmen and Danes no longer find the little rooms to stay in, as soldiers and workers move in. For the moment, then, the old cries against Tourism as the Enemy of Native Culture seem almost to be stilled. "Morally dangerous elements" used to convert all the nice young Greek adolescents to Gigolos and Junkies (the newspaper I am reading calls them "Junkers"—what would Düsseldorf think?). Now it seems the struggle is only a matter of the new souvenir shops. Should they sell such junk, and agree to accept oddly-coloured credit cards in strangely bartered payment?

I think back, in Telos, of some three post-war decades of Paradise-hunting. How many lost Edens have there been? Will Telos go the way of Ascona, and of Forio? We drove, having found a ferry place for our hired car, some four kilometres out of the village, and then walked into the cool sea alone, on a golden beach as far as the eye could see.

François Bondy

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income, they could look after themselves—better and far more cheaply. . . ."

CAN WE, THEN, AFFORD the Welfare State? Certainly not in its present form, and some European statesmen have been forced into a public admission of that fact. Dutch Prime Minister Joop den Uyl is planning welfare economies of 5·8 billion guilders over the next four years—the equivalent of 7·5% of the present annual social budget.

But how does one cut welfare without hurting those in real need? Virtually every expert I consulted stressed the need to return to the basic priorities for which our welfare systems were originally set up. Clearly, the state must make decent provision for the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the unemployed. It should then leave others with enough disposable income to meet most basic needs.

Since most Europeans want to buy their own homes, public authorities should possibly sell off most of their housing—keeping public facilities only for the old, the handicapped, or those with particular problems. The state could assist home-ownership simply by shifting funds from mammoth housing subsidies to the provision of low-interest loans and tax concessions.

Public authorities could also bow out of a wide range of advisory, community, consumer, recreational and other peripheral activities misclassified as "welfare." Those wondering where the axe should fall might well ponder Abraham Lincoln's dictum that government should restrict itself to those vital functions that the "community of people . . . cannot do at all, or cannot so well do for themselves." For government does nothing thriftily; and this is no modern insight. Two hundred years ago Adam Smith wrote, "It is the highest impertinence and presumption in kings and ministers to pretend to watch over the economy of private people. . . . They are themselves always, and without exception, the greatest spendthrifts in the society."

In addition to trimming welfare systems, they must also be made far more selective; and instead of subsidising services and providing benefits for everyone, one could simply top up the income of the poor. Perhaps the best means of doing this is with a "negative income tax." By combining tax and social security systems, it not only taxes the rich but annuls their unneeded welfare benefits. For the poor, it provides welfare benefits and can (according to family and other circumstances) bring a substantial addition to income.

Possibly the tax could encompass income-related allowances with which citizens could obtain state education, housing or medical care; alternatively, they could supplement these allowances with their own funds (or private insurance) to buy services at private institutions.[10] Such practicable schemes would not only release massive resources for essential, cash-starved services but reshape the welfare state to its true purposes.

As Arthur Seldon, an economist at London's Institute of Economic Affairs, has argued, "If Europe's citizens were given the same consumer choice in welfare services that they enjoy when buying food or a car, they would at last realise the full extent of the waste, the inefficiency and overstaffing of our so-called 'free' welfare state. The suppliers of state services would also feel the need to compete for and please those customers who are their paymasters. . . ."

Obviously, it will take supreme courage for Western Europe's politicians to persuade electors to accept a major restructuring, rationalisation, and trimming-down of overblown welfare systems. But, as Albert Delpérée, Secretary General of the Belgian Ministry of Social Security, put it to me, "Our problems give us no alternative but to be brave. Yet if we demand courage of political leaders, we must also expect more discipline and restraint from individual citizens. We must relearn to depend on ourselves—and not just on state welfare services. . . ."

[10] See: *1985, An Escape from Orwell's 1984*, edited by Dr Rhodes Boyson, (Churchill Press, 1975).

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Tell It Slant

On Emily Dickinson—By ANTHONY THWAITE

THE MOMENT ONE BEGINS to write about Emily Dickinson, or to read her in her entirety (and she is among the few poets who must be read whole, whatever discriminations one makes between major and minor pieces), the puzzles and paradoxes rain down so thickly that the critical faculty is inundated. For every text there is a counter-text. A transfigured affirmation on one page, a fervent witness of faith, is cancelled a few pages later by a canny scepticism or even a blank rejection. At one moment she seems to be using a microscope ("prudent/ In an Emergency") to peer into the secrets of the universe, at others she uses it whimsically to scan an alliterative host of bees, butterflies, birds, blooms and blossoms. Elsewhere, the visual range is grandiose, more than telescopic, when she confronts stars, planets, stupendous acts of creation and destruction ("Creation seemed a mighty Crack—/ To make me visible"), behind which hover the great abstractions—Eternity, Immortality. Often one is in the sort of quandary Philip Larkin has enshrined as "Is this an invitation to a walk, or a consummation with the Godhead?" The trivial and the transcendental, arch cutenesses and arcane cryptograms, lie side by side, not only on the same page but frequently within the same poem. A prosy bit of cracker-barrel philosophising, like this—

> *A Man may make a Remark—*
> *In itself—a quiet thing*
> *That may furnish the Fuse unto a Spark*
> *In dormant nature—lain—*

can suddenly step out of itself and become a runic apophthegm:

> *Let us deport—with skill—*
> *Let us discourse—with care—*
> *Powder exists in Charcoal—*
> *Before it exists in Fire.*

That injunction—the note of prudence again—has several riders attached to it in other poems, poems that with urgency or patience recommend secrecy, stealth, even perfidy and duplicity. To be oblique is to be a poet:

> *Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—*
> *Success in Circuit lies*
> *Too bright for our infirm Delight*
> *The Truth's superb surprise.*

Or from another poem, yet picking up that rhyme:

> *The Riddle we can guess*
> *We speedily despise*

The riddle of Emily Dickinson has stood high among literary conundrums ever since Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson launched the first volume of her poems on the public in 1890, four years after her death. The recluse, the woman in white, the witch of Amherst, the victim of a harsh "Barretts of Wimpole Street" father, the sex-mad virgin lusting hopelessly for married men, the lesbian adorer of Kate Anthon (or, alternatively, of sister-in-law Sue), the necrophile whose only fulfilment was in bereavement-notes and funerals—all these Dickinsons have had their advocates. Studies of her (textual, critical, "background", biographical) have increasingly become part of the American thesis industry.

A TWO-VOLUME *Life*, running to over 800 pages, might on the face of it seem an absurdly ponderous monument to a woman who said of herself (or *appeared* to say "of herself"): "Nothing has happened but loneliness." It is a tribute to Richard Sewall's scrupulousness and intelligence that one finishes reading his *Life of Emily Dickinson*[1] with a sense of profound understanding and without any doubt about the necessity of the book's length. It never pretends to be a handy companion guide to the poems (themselves now in paperback in the marvellous one-volume Johnson edition[2]), and the puzzles and paradoxes are still there in the texts of those poems; but

[1] *The Life of Emily Dickinson.* By RICHARD B. SEWALL. Two vols. Faber, £17.50.
[2] *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Edited by THOMAS H. JOHNSON. Faber, £3.95.

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Sewall has set her, as no one has satisfactorily managed to do before, in the context of her ancestors, her family, her friends and correspondents, her education and reading, and in the New England of her day. Even if one argues that a considerable part of his researches (for example, the long love affair between Emily's brother Austin and Mabel Loomis Todd) has little *direct* bearing on the poems, such furnishing of her world gives it body where until now there was sparseness, airlessness, or mere fanciful speculation and psychoanalytical snooping. In Sewall's pages, 19th-century Amherst lives: opening it up for our inspection, he also opens up the "mighty room" in which his subject lived, and shows that it was far from being a cell or a mausoleum.

SHE HAD A WIDE acquaintance; but even before her quarter-century of physical withdrawal a great deal of it was through correspondence. In a letter to Mrs Holland (wife of Dr Josiah Holland, co-editor with Samuel Bowles of *The Republican*, and later editor of *Scribner's*), she recalled a visit:

> After you went, a low wind warbled through the house like a spacious bird, making it high but lonely. When you had gone the love came. I supposed it would. The supper of the heart is when the guest has gone.

In other words, affection feeds on essence, not accidents; ordinary meetings are too open to chance, temporariness, the mundane. Memory has its own work to do in preserving friendship, and letters—like poems—can be rehearsed, studied and worked over before being sent. There is little spontaneity in Emily Dickinson's letters, and indeed there is plenty of evidence that she often composed several drafts before trusting them to their recipients. In a two-line fragment thought to have been written in the last year of her life, she said:

> *A Letter is a joy of Earth—*
> *It is denied the Gods.*

And part of that joy must have been that a letter is sealed, secret, a gift of reticence—even in adversity:

> *The most pathetic thing I do*
> *Is play I hear from you. . . .*

Playing—play-acting, adopting a *persona* long before that Latinism came into modern currency—was her habitual mode, in poems, in letters, and (in so far as one can detach it from these two) in life. In July 1862, writing to her patronising mentor Colonel Higginson, who only after her death came to some measure of realising the mettle of the woman he had been dealing with, she protested:

> When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person.

The three draft letters found among her papers after her death and known as the "Master" letters (because they begin "Dear Master"), may be part of this baffling dramatic ploy, this strategy that both heightens and distances crisis. Dense with metaphor, elliptical, staccato, veering suddenly from naked pleading to wry jokes (and my descriptions could as easily be applied to many of the poems), these letters are highly problematical. Professor Sewall weighs in the balance the likelihood of the recipient's identity: Samuel Bowles, the Rev. Charles Wadsworth, much more remotely the late passion of her life, Judge Otis Phillips Lord. Or were they fictions addressed to a fiction? The thought doesn't diminish them, for the anguish could have been real—as real as "The Loneliness One dare not sound . . . The Horror not to be surveyed" of the poems. Indeed, in a poem assigned to 1862, the year of her most copious production (over 350 poems) and quite possibly the year in which she wrote these "Master" letters, she said:

> *The Vision—pondered long—*
> *So plausible becomes*
> *That I esteem the fiction—real—*
> *The Real—fictitious seems—*

The "supposed person" she offered to Higginson was a feint but not a lie; subterfuge is a matter of tactics; to be devious is not necessarily to be "insincere." Adopting, as she often did, the guise of a little child, she anticipates in a game of hide-and-seek the breathless, blundering pursuit of all the literary sleuths who have followed her deceptive scent since 1890:

> *Good to hide, and hear 'em hunt!*

BUT THESE BIOGRAPHICAL trackings-down, these attempts to fit a specific face to great yearnings, somehow seem diminished—even when followed as patiently and sanely as Richard Sewall follows them—in the light and majesty of Emily Dickinson's central abiding theme: the eternal, the immortal. (Sewall: "No one—poet or lover or poet in love—is ever completely engrossed, or trapped, in a single aim or passion or person.") Sceptic though she was by conventional New England standards, she was daughter enough of her time and place to know that what led up to "the postponeless Creature" (Death) was a vale of soul-making, that life itself was a preparation. She could be pert about it, like a saucy child:

> *God is indeed a jealous God—*
> *He cannot bear to see*
> *That we had rather not with Him*
> *But with each other play.*

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Yet, beyond the God gestured at from pulpits, there was a mysterious goal for which she yearned:

> *Exultation is the going*
> *Of an inland soul to sea,*
> *Past the houses—past the headlands—*
> *Into deep Eternity—*

Yearned for, and yet sometimes inevitably feared too: a terrifying blankness hovers at the edge of some of her finest, most memorable poems—"I heard a Fly buzz when I died", "Because I could not stop for Death", "Our journey had advanced", "A Visitor in Marl—/Who influences Flowers." In what I find her most plainly powerful exordium on death, partly because it leads so circumstantially and resolutely to the edge, she produced something that makes Poe, for example, look absurdly shrill and unconvincing:

> *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,*
> *And Mourners to and fro*
> *Kept treading—treading—till it seemed*
> *That Sense was breaking through—*
>
> *And when they all were seated,*
> *A Service, like a Drum—*
> *Kept beating—beating—till I thought*
> *My Mind was going numb—*
>
> *And then I heard them lift a Box*
> *And creak across my Soul*
> *With those same Boots of Lead, again,*
> *Then Space—began to toll,*
>
> *As all the Heavens were a Bell,*
> *And Being, but an Ear,*
> *And I, and Silence, some strange Race*
> *Wrecked, solitary, here—*
>
> *And then a Plank in Reason, broke,*
> *And I dropped down, and down—*
> *And hit a World, at every plunge,*
> *And Finished knowing—then—*

For all its dream, or nightmare, setting, this has the authority of experience, quite different from the "precarious Gait" she stumbles into sometimes when her obliquity becomes mere mannerism; different, too, from the thumping metres, not far from George R. Sims and his fellow Victorian balladeers, which sound like echoes of the revivalist hymns of her girlhood:

> *Glee—the great storm is over.*
> *Four—have recovered the Land. . . .*

TO MY MIND, Professor Sewall makes it clear—or as clear as such an imponderable can ever be made—that Emily Dickinson's withdrawal from the mundane world of ordinary sociability was a gradual one, not dramatically touched off by a tangled love affair or a stern father, and one which was part of a strategy of preparation. Friends were all very well, but they

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were a distraction: when she wrote to Higginson, "To live is so startling, it leaves but little room for other occupations though Friends are if possible an event more fair", one must weigh the word *fair*—"attractive", "pleasant", "nice"; but not central, as the singular apprehension of life is, which requires solitude, dedication, concentration, the conscious rejection of all the little anaesthetics of amiability:

> *Narcotics cannot still the Tooth*
> *That nibbles at the soul—*

Professor Sewall's masterly analysis of Emily Dickinson's environment, and his commonsensical display of what was "normal" about it shouldn't disguise that what makes her unique is indeed her abnormality—not in the uniform of the queer Grandma Moses or the frustrated lesbian or any of the other lay figures that have stood in for the "real" Emily Dickinson for the past eighty-odd years, but as the rigorously disciplined poet who came to terms with her genius by renouncing everything that might stand in its way:

> *The Soul selects her own Society—*
> *Then—shuts the Door—*
> *To her divine Majority—*
> *Present no more—*

The process was almost imperceptible even to her family ("just a happen" was how they put it later); no single bout of despair, no particular experience of suffering, seems to have lain behind it. Yet it was final and decisive—as much so as the stanza I have just quoted indicates. In a Protestant society it was her half-sacred, half-creative equivalent of becoming a Bride of Christ, alerted to divine messages:

> *The only News I know*
> *Is Bulletins all Day*
> *From Immortality.*

Of course she felt she had lost something, and went on feeling so: that is what renunciation means: "A loss of something ever felt I. . . ." It's clear that she had yearnings for publication, for literary fame, else why should she have written to Higginson in the first place; and Bowles and Holland, whatever her more amorous feelings for them at a distance, were surely just as much seen as passports to the magazines. But she was not prepared to trim or supplicate (the ham-fisted treatment of the few poems she saw in print during her lifetime must have blunted any such thought): in the end, they would have to take her as they found her. Secretive, proud, she

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nevertheless allowed herself to peep into the future:

> *My Holiday shall be*
> *That They remember me—*
> *My paradise—the fame*
> *That They—pronounce my name.*

Is this a wistful prediction of "the sounds of Welcome" as the Saints greet her in heaven, or a visionary glimpse of Professors Sewall and Johnson, and the combined campuses of the Anglo-American literary world in 1976? As so often with Emily Dickinson, the answer is probably "Both." She relished ambiguities and transpositions; her "letter to the World" is far from "The simple News that Nature told", but is much more like Nature itself as she saw it:

> *We pass, and she abides.*
> *We conjugate Her Skill*
> *While She creates and federates*
> *Without a syllable.*

The Novel and the Market

Surveys of Fiction—By DAVID LODGE

THERE IS NO MORE DIFFICULT TASK for the literary critic than that of surveying the work of his own contemporaries, because of the sheer quantity of books and writers that have to be sorted and assessed. Experiments in the sociology of literature have shown that the total number of recognised "classics" at any given moment remains fairly constant, though the actual constituents of the total change from one generation or social group to another. Thus the preliminary work of the literary historian of the past is in a sense already done for him.

The "19th-century novel", for instance, as a literary-critical idea, is a brutally selective list of texts representing less than 1% of the novels actually published in the period, a list produced by the cumulative and largely undocumented choices and exclusions of innumerable educated readers. It is not quite the same list now as it was 50 years ago, and the items that are common are certainly not ranked in the same order, but the list exists, invisibly, as a paradigm of orthodox literary taste. The critic makes it visible in the process of confirming, qualifying or challenging it. Even in the world of contemporary letters, of course, there exists a certain degree of consensus about the writers who "count" and those who don't. But such assessments are very unstable, likely to be radically altered, for better or worse, by new publications; while the field of marginal or problematical contenders for inclusion in the canon of significant writing is very much larger than that which confronts the historian of the 19th-century novel, simply because time has not yet performed its winnowing work. The two books under review represent antithetical approaches to the problem: the encyclopaedic and the personal.

Contemporary Novelists[1] now in its second, revised edition, describes itself as "a reference guide to the most important living novelists and short story writers in the English language." It includes over 600 entries and runs to 1,636 pages. Each entry contains: biographical data, a full bibliography, details of other bibliographies and of the locations of manuscript collections; a list of critical studies recommended by the author: an optional comment by the author on his/her own work; and a short, signed article by a literary critic. Apart from this last item, the data are obtained by questionnaires sent to the entrants—a cunning publishing device which exploits the occupational vanity of authors to employ them as unpaid research workers. Proofs of the entries are corrrected by the authors, and this ensures a fairly high degree of accuracy, though the system is not foolproof. I was startled, for instance, to find myself credited with the authorship of a play called *Help,* first performed in Stockport, Cheshire in 1969; and Kingsley Amis's "Four Fluent Fellows" in ENCOUNTER (October 1973) was an essay on Chesterton, not, as alleged here, a short story. But these were the only substantial errors of fact that I noticed (as distinct from misprints, of which there are a fair number).

The main disadvantage of relying so heavily upon the entrants themselves for information is that the sections on "critical studies" are very erratic and inconsistent. Some authors have restricted themselves to mentioning books and articles, others have listed reviews, and the majority have left this section of their questionnaire blank—perhaps even authorial vanity has its limits, which fall short of riffling through cuttings-files to verify references. As a bibliography of secondary sources, then, *Contemporary Novelists* is disappointing. In other respects it is a useful, well-designed reference book, and an

[1] *Contemporary Novelists.* Edited by JAMES VINSON and D. L. KIRKPATRICK. St. James Press, £12.00; St. Martin's Press, $35.00.

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Millennium and Charisma among Pathans

A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology

AKBAR S. AHMED

Foreword by Professor Ernest Gellner

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A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa

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This is a sociological and historical study of class and race relations in a crucial sector of South Africa—the gold mining industry during and following the First World War. The author develops a Marxist structuralist explanation of the system of racial discrimination, and examines the significant historical events of the formative period.
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A Study Across Three Areas

D. M. DOWNES, B. P. DAVIES, M. E. DAVID and P. STONE

The British have in recent years come to be known as a nation of gamblers, though until now barely any evidence has existed against which to assess the claim that gambling has become a major social problem. The authors present their data on how prevalent different forms of gambling are, and how much time and money is expended on them, providing a more systematic basis for an explanation of gambling in relation to social structure than has so far been available. £8.25

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interesting browsing book. By the standards of today's prices, it is amazingly good value.

THE CHIEF FEATURE OF INTEREST for most users will be the authors' comments on their own work —volunteered by more than half the entrants. These vary a good deal in style, from the short essay (Frederick Raphael's seems to be the longest by a short head from Angus and Colin Wilson) to Christine Brooke-Rose's laconic one-liner: "Let us not commit the intentional fallacy." Many other entrants echo this sentiment, which also no doubt explains the silence of the 40-odd % who volunteered no comment at all. Their reserve is honourable and understandable, but the fact is that authors' comments on their own work have a special interest (if not a special authority) and most readers will be glad that Messrs Raphael, Wilson, *etc.* took the time and trouble to think aloud about their writing.

There are, perhaps, few surprises among these statements. Kingsley Amis asserts that he is "trying to tell interesting, believable stories about understandable characters in a reasonably straightforward style: no tricks, no experimental foolery." Beryl Bainbridge confesses disarmingly, "I am not very good at fiction . . . it is always me and the experiences I have had." Richard Condon says: "Readers buy novels to be entertained, to be taken out of their own lives for a few hours, not to purchase the awe of the ages which will follow." Mordecai Richler says: "Like any serious writer, I want to write one novel that will last, something that will make me remembered after death, and so I'm compelled to keep trying." Auberon Waugh indulges in a characteristic outburst of spleen against academic influences on the writing and criticism of fiction, concluding with a neat stab in the back of his own critic, Elmer Borklund ("A good example of the academic style of criticism in all its banal superciliousness and ponderous unreadability may be seen below"). Surprisingly few writers take the opportunity to defend themselves against the slings and arrows of literary life. Mark Harris is an exception, though his words will probably evoke a responsive echo in many of his *confrères:*

> "My novels are always very carefully written. Since hard work makes the writing look easy, there exist stupid reviewers and critics who think I (and others) just slam these writings out. My books are all constructed with great care. Nothing is missing from any of them in the way of plot. I forget nothing."

Although it spreads its net very wide, *Contemporary Novelists* is still obliged to select some novelists and to exclude others. This operation has been carried out in consultation with a panel of some thirty advisers who are listed at the begin-

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ning of the volume. The book may be said, therefore, to represent a loose consensus of orthodox literary opinion as to who are the "important" contemporary writers of fiction. The book is rightly biased towards writers of some serious literary pretension, but a good many entertainers are included (the distinction is adequately illustrated by the quotations from Condon and Richler above) if their writing has a touch of class about it. Condon and Len Deighton are in; Harold Robbins and Alistair Maclean are out. Very few writers of real distinction have slipped through the net: Gabriel Josipovici, Jennifer Johnston and the American short-story writer Leonard Michaels were the most conspicuous absentees I noted—all of them winners of prestigious literary prizes, and around long enough now to have been picked up in this second edition, even if they missed the first.

The critical articles are contributed by some two hundred critics, and there is, inevitably, a good deal of variation in their approaches to this task. Some write as fans, or feel that the occasion calls for enthusiasm, while others are coolly detached and occasionally hostile. William Walsh's warm appreciation of Brian Glanville and George Woodcock's unfriendly appraisal of Leonard Cohen are extreme instances of each stance. The editors have obviously tried to match writers with sympathetic critics, and on the whole have succeeded; but there is an element of luck for the individual writer, and inevitably no single, consistent criterion of merit is implicit in the whole book.

IN PRINCIPLE THAT IS precisely what Ronald Hayman's booklet[2] offers, since it is the work of one man. The scope of *The Novel Today*, the latest in a series of such surveys sponsored by the British Council, is somewhat smaller than that of *Contemporary Novelists*, excluding American fiction (except in incidental allusion) and limiting itself to writers who have been active over the last eight years, but it is still a formidably large field to cover in some sixty pages. Mr Hayman's solution to the problem is to select the fifty British and Commonwealth novelists whom he finds "most impressive", group them (rather desperately) into sets (*e.g.* "The weariness of the long-distance novelist: William Golding, Lawrence Durrell and Richard Hughes") and pass brief comments on their work. Inevitably this begins to read, after a while, like a collection of end-of-term reports, in which an encouraging word is found for everybody, qualified by a more

[2] *The Novel Today* 1967–75. By RONALD HAYMAN. Longman, for the British Council, 90p.

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"This well-written little book does a good job of pulling together most of the publicly available data and commentary on the events surrounding President Kennedy's decision in May 1961 to commit the United States to effecting a manned lunar landing before 1970." *L. V. Blankenship, Science.*
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History TODAY

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The SEPTEMBER issue includes:

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or less stern warning that the author must try harder. The procedure is unlikely to endear Mr Hayman to many of the writers discussed.

But given that the brief was an impossible one, Mr Hayman has managed it as well as could reasonably be expected, and the booklet is impressively up-to-date—including, for example, a thoughtful appreciation of Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*, published only four months previously. The survey is followed by a useful checklist of contemporary fiction extending well beyond the selected 50 authors, and the whole book is attractively printed and illustrated. I noticed only one error: Mr Hayman's surprising assertion that D. J. Enright has published no novel since *Academic Year* (1955). It is, presumably, entirely coincidental that, as William Walsh records in the relevant entry of *Contemporary Novelists*, the three novels Enright has published since *Academic Year* all draw upon the author's experiences as a British Council-sponsored professor of English in the Far East, the last of them, *Figures of Speech* (1965), including a "peculiarly abrasive treatment" of the hero's relations with that institution.

Mr Hayman manages to raise some interesting general questions about the state of contemporary fiction within the brief compass of his booklet. One is the question of realism and its alternatives. His first chapter (discussing the work of B. S. Johnson, Ann Quin, David Plante, Christine Brooke-Rose, Brigid Brophy and Gabriel Josipovici) is entitled, "Realism and experiment are not antithetical", but this bold assertion is made good at the expense of some semantic juggling. Mr Hayman quotes Michel Butor to the effect that "new forms will reveal new things in reality, new connexions", but to say that all novels are in some sense about reality does not mean that all novels are realistic. Critical discussion can hardly proceed usefully unless we reserve the term "realistic" for the mode of pseudo-historical fictional narrative as practised by Richardson, Balzac, Tolstoy, George Eliot, Arnold Bennett, Christopher Isherwood and Graham Greene, to choose a few names at random from the tradition—the mode whose conventions and rules Roland Barthes analyses so well in *S/Z*, the mode of the *lisible* or "readerly" text. The *nouveaux romanciers*, and the English experimental novelists discussed by Mr Hayman in his first chapter, are writing for the most part in a spirit of explicit rejection of that literary mode and the epistemology it incarnates, and there seems no point in pretending otherwise.

Realism and experiment *are* antithetical (though not mutually exclusive) in this sense: that the more the novelist disrupts the continuity and varies the texture of his discourse (the usual

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signs of "experiment" in fiction) the less likely he is to create the kind of illusion of life that is characteristic of the realistic novel, and vice versa. As Ortega y Gasset observed:

> To enjoy a novel we must feel surrounded by it on all sides; it cannot exist as a more or less conspicuous thing among the rest of things.

But that is precisely what experiment does—makes the novel visible as an object by calling attention to its formal properties; and it does so on the grounds that to disguise the conventionality of art as transparency, to make the cultural appear natural, is an act of aesthetic and ideological bad faith. Mr Hayman is right to say that "between the extremes of retrogression and the extremes of experimentalism there is a great variety of possibilities", but wrong to imply that these distinctions don't really matter, or that they aren't useful for purposes of classification.

THE SECOND GENERAL POINT raised by Mr Hayman is the influence of the socio-economic context of fiction publishing upon the artistic product. "Critics and historians of the novel generally pay too little attention to the consumer and to conditions prevailing in the market", he observes; and perhaps we are more likely to neglect these factors the nearer we come to the present day. It is a commonplace that the expansiveness of the Victorian novel owed a good deal to the practice of serial publication and the three-volume format favoured by the circulation libraries; but it is more startling to contemplate the suggestion recently put forward by John Sutherland in an interesting article in the *New Review* (Volume 2, No. 18, September 1975) and cited by Mr Hayman, that "it is the two-week, six-book lending rule [in public libraries] which has produced the noticeable shortness of the English novel compared to its American counterpart."

Certainly the public library system now plays a crucial role in the economics of fiction publishing in this country, compared to others. In France in 1965, one book was borrowed from a public library for every ten bought; in Britain the ratio was almost exactly the reverse, 38 borrowed to 4 bought. In 1970 the public libraries in the USA issued 450 million loans. Britain, with its much smaller population, issued in the same year the staggering total of 600 million loans, and of these about three-quarters would be works of fiction.

The subject is of considerable topical interest because of the debate over the Public Lending Right, and the figures just quoted were in fact supplied by the Writers' Action Group and published in another issue of the *New Review* (Volume 2, No. 21, December 1975) largely

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devoted to this subject.[3] Mr Hayman puts the case for PLR by means of an example:

> To produce 1,600 copies of a 160-page book in 1975 costs £1,420—about three times as much as it did four years earlier. If all 1,600 copies were sold, about 1,400 would have been bought by libraries. Assuming that the price was £3.50 and that the average library copy will have been read forty times before it falls to pieces, the author's total earnings from his ten per cent royalty remain at £560, though the book will have been read by 56,200 people including the 200 who have paid for their copy.

The example is perhaps a little artificial. Few novels are borrowed frequently enough to cause disintegration—certainly not the kind of novel that gets a first printing as small as 1,600 copies. And perhaps not all novels that are borrowed are actually read, or read to the end—the system encourages extravagant and undiscriminating borrowing precisely because it costs the borrower nothing. It can be argued (and has been on many occasions) that without the guaranteed library sale, however small, a publisher would not be able to take the risk of publishing fiction of minority appeal in the first place; as it is, the novel in the example would not break even, for the publisher, without some additional earnings from the sale of subsidiary rights.

Mr Hayman neglects to mention the effect of the paperback revolution on fiction publishing and the growth of other new markets (film and TV adaptation for example) which have brought about a situation in which the successful writer is probably more highly rewarded today than ever before, while the minority-appeal writer is arguably at least no worse off (in 1929, at the age of 47, Virginia Woolf was earning only £520 per year from her books).[4]

The fact remains that the reader of fiction, as a result of a massive shift of middle-class patronage from commercial to public lending libraries since the War, is now having his leisure reading paid for by the taxes of the whole community, and it is only fair that writers as well as readers should get their fair share of this subsidy through PLR. By a cruel irony it looks as though this long-delayed measure will finally be introduced at precisely that moment when the public library system is obliged drastically to curtail its buying of new fiction because of economic cutbacks in the public sector. The Buckinghamshire County

[3] These figures were challenged by Mr B. Luckham in *The New Review* (3/25, 1976) and were subsequently disowned (though not entirely discredited) by the Writers' Action Group, who name UNESCO as the source (*New Review*, 3/27, 1976).

[4] As Malcolm Bradbury notes in his *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (1971), which contains much useful information of this kind.

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Library has already stopped buying fiction altogether, and is actually appealing to the public to donate books (whether PLR will be payable on such books is a nice point for lawyers).

THIS IS INDEED A PECULIARLY difficult time at which to make predictions about the future of fiction as an institution. For many years the total number of fiction titles (including reprints) in this country has continued to rise in spite of the gloomiest prognostications. The recent staggering inflation and general economic recession, have however, created a genuinely new situation, of which the drastic cut back in library acquisitions is only one symptom. Paperback publishers are becoming more cautious, and in response hardback publishers are setting up new, often cooperative paperback imprints of their own, whose viability has yet to be proved. The distribution of new hardback fiction through bookshops has virtually broken down—there are too many titles, too few outlets, and insufficient knowledgeable staff; every author has a bitter fund of anecdote about people who have tried in vain to purchase his book. As the bibliographies in *Contemporary Novelists* show very clearly, it is becoming harder and harder for British novelists to publish in America, and vice versa, for two reasons; the literary tastes of the two countries are growing further and further apart, and in a time of economic recession publishers prefer to invest in their own native writers—not for patriotic reasons, but because these are a more lucrative source of earnings from subsidiary rights. Novels get less and less review space in the press, as associated advertising revenue to newspapers declines because publishers can no longer afford the rates.

These commercial trends may seem to have little to do with the future of the novel as an art form. But the novel, more than any other literary genre, was contaminated by money, by the play of the market, from its very inception, and it seems unlikely that it will ever free itself entirely from such influences. Certainly writers, such as Richard Condon, who see themselves primarily as entertainers will be more conditioned by the state of the market than writers, such as Mordecai Richler, who are ultimately interested in immortality; but even Mr Richler might be reduced to silence if sufficiently discouraged by frustration and failure in the effort to communicate with an audience. As Mr Hayman says,

> It is remarkable that in spite of these pressures on [the novelist] so much good work is being produced . . . even if there are no great novelists writing today, there is a great variety of extremely interesting ones who have so far succeeded in maintaining high standards.

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Walter Allen, in his preface to *Contemporary Novelists,* is in emphatic agreement:

> If I do not believe that we live in one of the great periods of the novel, I do emphatically believe that we live in a time distinguished by a bigger concentration of talented men and women only less than great than has ever been seen before in the history of the novel in English.

To browse through these two books, and to bring into focus the distinctive achievement of novelist after novelist, is to feel the force and truth of those words.

Money & Sex & So On

Some Recent Fiction—By JAMES PRICE

NOËL COWARD DIES at the beginning of Muriel Spark's new novel.[1] The morning news calls it "the passing of an era." To Hubert Mallindaine, 45-year old literary crook living in Italy, everything in recent months has signified the passing of an era.

> Eras pass, thought Hubert. They pass every day. He felt dejected. He cheered up. Then he felt dejected again.

Hubert nevertheless manages quite well. He lives in a house at Nemi, south of Rome, built for him by his rich American protectress Maggie Radcliffe (as was), the Marchesa di Tullio-Friole (as is), preparing for the day of his eviction by carefully having duplicated her Gauguin and the Louis XIV furniture, and feeding the originals on to the market. He is served, bored and blackmailed by his secretary Pauline Thin (Sacred Heart and Cheltenham Ladies' College), but he hankers for the delightful male secretaries of a previous summer.

He also claims to be a direct descendant of the goddess Diana of Nemi and the Emperor Caligula. His house has a view of the lake and the Alban hills beyond, the scene described in *The Golden Bough*, and here as the novel progresses he revives the cult of Diana with himself as priest. "Terrific ecology" says one of two American priests who pay him an unexpected visit at the beginning of the book: "This is a wonderful environmental location." Indeed it is. Presented with a lush, formalised, Poussin-like elegance, it provides a stage for the novel's actors who, not unlike the characters in a Noël Coward play, exist to glitter, to talk, and to amuse.

Maggie Radcliffe, by implication Diana to Hubert's priest, is a force to be reckoned with. She is not just rich; she is super-rich, larger than life, with more vitality and more resourcefulness than seems fair. A part of her energies is given over to unsuccessful attempts to winkle Hubert out of his house. But another and larger part is devoted to her financial affairs, and to adapting her methods to deal with the changed circumstances following the oil crisis of 1973. The realisation of these changed circumstances does not occur instantly, or at least none of the characters sees the change in quite the apocalyptic terms the author uses:

> a complete mutation not merely to be defined as a collapse of the capitalist system, or a global recession, but such a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud.

It is Maggie who experiences this most plainly because it is Maggie who is cheated by Hubert, Maggie who is robbed by some efficient burglars of her summer jewellery (valued beyond the reach of insurance companies), and Maggie who above all is tricked of the bulk of her fortune by Coco de Renault, a con-man from the Argentine. For her the change in reality does indeed seem to be total. For the other characters the process is more gradual, confused with the rise of Communism in Italy and similar matters. The enterprising Maggie responds to Coco de Renault's crooked dealings by having him kidnapped (she is still rich enough for that) and recovering her fortune by way of ransom; but even so, things for her will never be the same as they were.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND of chicanery and self-help the other characters make their entrances and exits. Fathers Cuthbert and Gerard pop in now and again to raise laughter about the Church and/or Americans.

> "Isn't your chair comfortable, Cuthbert?" Hubert said.
> "My chair?—Oh, yes, thank you kindly, it's quite comfortable, Hubert."

[1] *The Takeover*. By MURIEL SPARK. Macmillan, £3.95.

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> "Cuthbert very often motionizes", Gerard explained with well-wined pleasantness, "while verbalizing, depending upon the emotive force of the topic in its relation to the scope and limitations inherent in the process of verbalization."

Maggie's earnest daughter-in-law Mary appears as a foil and confidante.

> When she reached Lausanne Maggie put a call through to Mary from her hotel.
> "Mary", said Maggie, lying on the bed wrapped in towels, for the call had come through while she was in her bath, "I've drawn the ace of spades in the game of life."
> "Excuse me?" said Mary.
> "I say I've met with disaster."
> "Oh, you've had an accident?"

Lauro, a handsome fertility-symbol and an insufferably casual servant, is bedded by nearly everyone, a little like the Terence Stamp character in Pasolini's *Theorem*; and another servant, Clara, merely bulges:

> Bulging Clara, the Bernardinis' chronically victimized maid, stopped in the main street of Nemi, and put down her plastic shopping bags, bulging like herself they were.

The verbal flourish is typical of a novel luxuriating in tropes of all kinds.

In spite of the attention given to it I don't think the Diana theme is much more than an elegant device. Hubert's followers flock to Nemi, and there he performs a service of worship, celebrating (as it turns out) Diana as a source of wealth as much as Diana the huntress. Pauline Thin, dressed to Hubert's horror in a khaki trouser suit and high canvas boots, reads from the Acts of the Apostles the passage about Demetrius the silversmith, who made silver shrines for Diana ("Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth"). And though we hear at the end of the book that Hubert has been invited to continue his activities inside the Church ("You do the murmuring rite so well and Cuthbert said it wouldn't be in conflict with Diana as the preserver of nature, not at all") the theme has by then been exhausted, its purposes in the novel fulfilled.

Once there was a Muriel Spark who wrote novels set in recognisable places involving freshly observed characters and real-life situations. Now the characters tend to be types, the situations far-fetched, the locations expensive scenery. How opprobrious that sounds. But *The Takeover*, it seems to me, is a comedy written with a quite irresistible zest and invention, carrying the reader along whether he approves of it or not. It

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There is another observation to make. The copyright line on the back of the title page reads not "Muriel Spark" but "Verwaltungs AG 1976." For British readers now the author of *The Girls of Slender Means* has become one of the international rich she likes to write about. *The Takeover* is an international book in the sense that its author has somehow succeeded in de-nationalising herself, so that the jokes at the expense of manners or verbal usage are never chauvinistic. From what point of view are they made then? The reader cannot be supposed to feel at home in the rich milieu of the novel, nor is he invited to identify with any of the characters, so the trust one puts in the author is considerable. There is no sign that she is abusing it. There is every sign that she has so mastered her technique that the question of author's viewpoint—and the answer too—slips by almost unnoticed. That is, that the international writer, as Muriel Spark has now been for so long, takes her bearings and makes her judgments, not from experience or background shared with the reader, nor from any group of assorted characters such as people *The Takeover*, but from herself, her knowledge, prejudices, preferences, and wisdom. It is a solitary and most difficult procedure, but there is no sign of difficulty whatever in this hugely pleasurable book.

THE OPERATING LEVER IN *The Takeover* is money. In John Lahr's second novel[2] the activator is sex. *The Autograph Hound* gave an indication of Mr Lahr's prodigious energy and unusual verbal gifts, and the new book shows these qualities to an even more remarkable degree. George Melish is a New Yorker who comes to Oxford from Yale, marries Irene, who is English and the daughter of a peer, becomes a big success in American television, then loses Irene to, first, a soft-spoken colleague called John, and, second, a guitar-toting rock star called Fred. The action takes place on the night of George's 36th birthday; he watches his wife's lovemaking from a tree, kidnaps his two children, himself has a violent bout of sex with John's wife Sally, returns his children, and ends by accepting in some measure that he and Irene are finally going to be divorced. Mixed up in the events of the night there are fantasies and memories of his past served up in the same staccato, fragmentary form as the present; it is a

[2] *Hot to Trot*. By JOHN LAHR. Eyre Methuen, £3.75.

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book of short and vivid sections, mostly in dialogue.

The fluency of Mr Lahr's dialogue is remarkable. His characters use language which is utterly direct, conveying meaning brusquely and brutally. It is very coarse and very funny. It is also infinitely allusive, in particular to popular song, literature, movies, places, and brand-names. George, as we are told more than once, looks like Jeff Chandler. He has fantasy conversations with Rita Hayworth ("Just a thong at twilight"). He dreams of Irene being murdered ("Knife wounds, almost invisible to the naked eye, riddle her torso. Her breasts are gone."), of bravely carrying the coffin down the nave, of standing by it with his two children and speaking her eulogy:

> "The way she wore her hat. The way she sipped her tea. The mem'ry of all that. No, no, they can't take that away from me."

Gershwin is part of the cultural baggage, and quoting him is one of the ways in which George defines himself.

All Mr Lahr's characters are actors; they play scenes, they quote other men's lines, they present versions of themselves. When George arrives at Sally's apartment he finds that the whole occasion of his meeting her is being recorded on film by her appalling daughter, who explains:

> For three hours a day, I sit in the video lab re-running pictures of myself. I'm my homework. I know my walk. My laugh. My disguises. My friends. I can play them back, speed them up. After a while, the Jenny on the screen is a character in somebody else's film. I can be objective.

But George is the chief actor in George's story. There is the question of how to perform when Irene starts being unfaithful to him, and one theme of the novel is simply that. But subsidiary themes are to do with other roles: ways to get girls, for instance, or being a father or successful television producer. Going to Yale involves initiation ceremonies; keeping in touch with Yale involves Class Notes in the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, in a style which is a performance in itself. But the central scene is sex. George practises a good deal at sex.

> Don't think I haven't played around. I have. Don't think women aren't attracted to me. They are. I've threaded the eye of the Golden Doughnut many times.

He thinks about sex most of the time, and he prides himself on his performance. For him to be rejected in sex therefore is for him to be rejected in his starring role. Watching Irene and Fred from his tree he is a laid-up actor criticising his understudy:

> The bedroom lights pop on. That was quick. Bill

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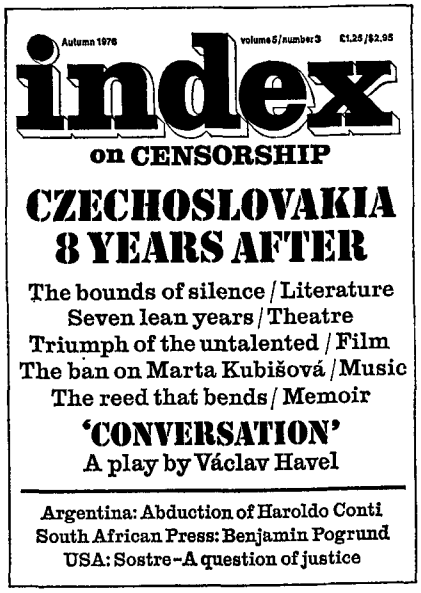

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Haley is about as fast in the saddle as an old seventy-eight—three minutes and lift up the needle. . . . He just doesn't know how to pull out all Irene's stops. In ten minutes, I could've given him a cram course and whipped him into shape. It's the pioneer who gets to know the territory.

These Goffmanesque excursions are interwoven with stuff of a more familiar kind. Those parts of the book dealing with George's growing up are a funny, touching, and knockabout foray into the not unexplored territory of backseat sexual experiment. George's mother is Catholic, not Jewish, but the fact doesn't make for much variation in the presentation of what are essentially stock characters (though on one occasion there is a memorable conjugal fight: "Go shit in a hat, Vera!"). There is uneasiness and a lack of shading and allusiveness in the handling of Irene's Englishness. The cause of her withdrawal from George is never clear to him nor, I think, to the reader. She can be neurotic ("who wants to stuff a psycho?"), and she can be demandingly possessive (as George says to a spider in his tree, "it's hard to get your rocks off without being swallowed alive"). She doesn't like sex with the lights on, and she is not as sexually appreciative as Rita Hayworth, Barbara Stanwyck, Gene Tierney, or any of the other images which appear in George's head as soon as the lights are off. The real difficulty seems to be incompatibility of style: George can't make the distance in his life, and Mr Lahr can't quite make it in what is otherwise a shrewd, funny and accomplished novel.

CAROLINE BLACKWOOD'S first novel[3] is short, intense, arrestingly individual. A woman, K, writes imaginary confessional letters. Her husband has left her, in her high Manhattan apartment, for a younger woman. He has left her with Renata, the 13-year-old child of a previous marriage, whom she fears and detests. She also has a 4-year-old child of her own, Sally Ann, and a French *au pair*, Monique. Renata is fat, silent, unhappy. She uses enormous quantities of lavatory paper and blocks the pipe. She watches TV alone in her room. She makes cakes, from instant cake-mix, obsessively, and eats them herself.

In her imaginary letters K rails against her husband and against Renata, and also against Monique. She describes her hatred, the reasons for it, and the ways in which she gives expression to it. She compares herself to the evil stepmother in Snow White.

[3] *The Stepdaughter*. By CAROLINE BLACKWOOD. Duckworth, £2.95.

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> The girl obsesses me. All the anger I should feel for Arnold I feel for Renata. If Arnold's letter from Paris was a shock to me—the thing that I found by far the most shocking about it was that he made absolutely no mention of any future plans to remove his hefty, damaged daughter from under my roof. Is Arnold going insane? Or is he being very cunning? Does Arnold really think that he can leave this fat neurotic girl in my apartment just as if she was some inanimate object like an umbrella that he happened to leave behind?

The Stepdaughter fixes an unwavering stare at feelings. But feelings, it seems to say, are governed by understanding. The novel proceeds, in a ratiocinative manner, through stages of understanding and through a progression of feeling. K's realisation that Arnold has dumped Renata upon her is qualified, as the narrative proceeds, by further stations of awareness which might almost be numbered. (1) Arnold's "middle-class conscience" would not allow him to abandon the girl to an orphanage. (2) Renata's presence in the apartment was nevertheless a cause of his leaving K. (3) Arnold wanted K to love Renata, which would have got him off an emotional hook. (4) The generous legal settlement he proposes contains an invisible clause: keep the big apartment, but keep Renata. (5) She finds that Arnold had been planning to leave her a full year before he did, and his generosity and concern over furnishing the apartment were really for Renata's sake. (6) By leaving her with Renata Arnold has condemned K to solitude; she can never, like Arnold, marry again. (7) But for Arnold's talents and industry K would not now be living in an expensive high-rise apartment with a view: she is totally reliant upon him.

She decides to pack Renata off to Arnold in Paris, and for the first time speaks to the girl who, suddenly and surprisingly articulate, and—K for the first time awkwardly perceives—possibly pretty underneath her fat, tells K that Arnold was not really her father, though he married her mother thinking that he was. The stages of understanding continue to unroll. (8) Arnold told Renata the truth not to hurt her but so that she would not think him a bad father. (9) Renata says of Arnold that he "has always been really great to me." (10) Arnold had lied to K for Renata's sake: he was her shield. (11) Leaving Renata with her was "some kind of back-handed compliment." All these sequential perceptions modify K's feelings, which work themselves away from hatred towards a concern and acceptance which the novel is careful not to label love.

After her conversation with K, Renata disappears, like Snow White in the forest. The novel ends.

> It is all such a waste. It need never have happened. Everything seemed so much better. I was just starting to learn to adjust to her. How I loathe the thought of my future, sitting around in my apartment, endlessly hearing no news—endlessly asking myself the same questions.

With its unblinking view of man's selfishness and woman's dependence *The Stepdaughter* is a notable contribution to the women's movement, though it contains a scene with a woman friend which serves to protect it from too facile a categorisation. It is also, I should hazard, a philosophical and religious novel. It begins with a cry of pain, which can be seen to be a philosophical position. It ends with a sense of loss, which can be seen to be a religious one. It is an unusual and affecting experience.

Caves

The maps record only the townlands,
The daylight world that even strangers know
As field and farm. It rains on the hills,
The hillsides drink it in. The country steams
And watches clouds passing.

But here there is a darker underland.
Moon milk and cave coral sprout below
In sinks and shakeholes. Quietly they fill.
In Fathers' Hole and Cradle Pot the streams
Are massing.

Frank Ormsby

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MEMOIR

Remembering Lionel Trilling

By Jacques Barzun

DEATH HOLDS few gifts that the witnesses of her work will thank her for—except at times a merciful swift stroke. But rather more often, when the departed has been chargeable with deeds of note, death earns our grudging thanks for releasing the pent-up praise of many hitherto silent contemporaries. They are shocked into utterance, and their words have the ring of truth. So it has been for Lionel Trilling. Ever since his death last November, we have been learning who he was. With scarcely a moment's hush, the chorus of recognition broke out. Obituaries in superlatives, long articles at the head of reviews, re-issues of books, adoption by book clubs, suggestions of collected works, offers of posthumous honours, proposals for biographies, agitation over the fate of his papers—all express a sorrow in which may be discerned a tremor of self-reproach. *The Times* of London summed up the subject of this late *empressement* and the judgment about its cause: "A LITERARY CRITIC OF MAJOR STATURE."

This change in the weather of opinion, experienced meteorologists agree, comes about only because the beneficiary is no longer part of it. For 35 years, Lionel Trilling thought and wrote and received due notice as his books appeared. They were admired; they were cavilled at; they were liked; they were ignored; they were classified: thoughtful essays from a mind once involved in radical politics and now working for "culture" with the ideas of Freud. The times then and *The Times* now cannot both be right.

It is no doubt unprofitable to look for reasons behind the fact of an unwarrantably subdued reputation, but it may be said in passing that if Trilling had written more novels than one, or if he had spoken as a free lance instead of from an academic platform, the response might have been different—not wiser, perhaps, but louder and nearer the mark. These conditions are at any rate worth noting, because they bear on American intellectual habits during the last half-century and suggest appropriate questions about Trilling's intellectual position, about his life and his career.

IN ITS OUTWARD FORM Trilling's career typifies the lot of the American writer after the First World War. By the 1920s only the highly successful playwright or novelist could live by literature. Journalism was at once inhospitable and devitalising; and it was a long time since consulships and other government sinecures such as had helped Hawthorne or William Dean Howells could be thought of. Arts and letters began to take refuge in the most unexpected sanctuary, the University. Nobody then deemed it a hardship, but rather an advance in our cultural arrangements. The literary youth who in college had had dreams of writing went on to graduate work and found himself in the academic groove without any arduous choice.

Thus it was that in 1925 Lionel Trilling, having just graduated from Columbia College, began studies for a higher degree, started teaching, first in Wisconsin, then at Hunter, a girls' college in New York City, and finally returned to Columbia as an instructor in 1932. There, in the undergraduate division which he always preferred, and in a seminar for Ph.D. candidates which he and I organised and taught together, Lionel spent all his adult life. Only towards the end did he make three excursions for lectureships at Harvard and Oxford. One could paraphrase Stendhal's epitaph and say: "He lived, he taught, he wrote."

But the academic life, to which he was in a double sense reduced, explains little about the character or significance of his work. Trilling was the very negation of an academic critic. His volleys of thought were not discharged from behind any walls, nor did his complexity subserving clear principles arise from method, scholarly or new-contrived. The clue to the form his genius took lies elsewhere, in his origins and historical situation.

Lionel Trilling was born in New York City on 4 July 1905, in what used to be termed "modest circumstances." The old phrase, which denoted solvent respectability, connoted the lack of expensive experiences, such as travel and a wide acquaintance. But it did often imply a family setting in which the life of the mind holds the highest place. This was true of Lionel. Both parents were great readers—Dickens was read aloud to him before he knew his alphabet—and they could claim, on each side, close family links with members of the intellectual professions. The education they wished for their son and a musical daughter they regarded as much more than the accepted means of economic advancement. It was a ladder, no doubt, but also a rooftop from which to contemplate the world. A second piece of good fortune for the children was that in those prehistoric days the free city schools had not yet become nurseries of illiteracy and vandalism;

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they still supplied excellent instruction and thorough preparations for college.

This is not to say that Lionel distinguished himself as a student. When I first knew him in Columbia College, he seemed content to do well, with little exertion, in what he liked and to stumble through the rest. He nearly failed of the degree from invincible ignorance in maths, but a far-seeing mathematician-dean rescued him by legerdemain at the last minute. To the superficial glance of another youth, fresh from Europe, the young Trilling appeared to be indulging himself in a borrowed bohemianism. He read much and wrote a few delicate sketches of symbolist cast for campus publication. He affected a languid, sauntering elegance (of manner, not of dress). And while I was dimly aware of a brooding strength, I failed to make out any particular direction it might take. Nor did I suspect the great shyness which was being masked by a manner and which persisted for a lifetime after the manner was gone.

The first half-dozen years of Lionel's teaching were arduous, at times desperate. The city college for girls, where he landed after his Midwestern beginnings, paid by the piece—one student-one unit fee (slightly larger for the more advanced). During the Depression, Lionel had become the sole support of his family, and in 1929 he married. I had lost track of him, for in College we were only casual acquaintances. On his return to Columbia, which I had never left, we quickly became friends; and in 1934 we were assigned to teach a joint colloquium for upperclassmen. Its contents were "the great books" from the Renaissance to the end of the 19th Century; and it was in those weekly Wednesday evenings with senior students, as well as in the private sessions of preparing, that Lionel and I began the association that was to last until his death.

THE FIRST YEARS of our teaching together was the time when not merely literature at large, but criticism as a genre was making its way, cuckoo-like, into the nest of scholarship. It was still risky for the young to write and publish "outside"—say, a book review in a weekly journal of opinion—or (as I learned to my cost) to be seen at a concert. Promotion to tenure, that is, final acceptance by the academy, depended on the writing of a doctoral dissertation, and nothing more plainly shows how unprepared the university was for harbouring critics than that it allowed Lionel, without a word of warning, to spend seven mortal years in writing a masterpiece of intellectual biography and criticism—his *Matthew Arnold* of 1939. Inappropriate and little regarded as a dissertation ("based on published sources only"), it is still in print and still what one of our less articulate Columbia students called it: "insurmountable."

From the scope of that book and the evident sympathy between author and subject, it has been hastily inferred by some that Trilling's life-work was but a continuation, an adaptation of the gospel of culture. This view is mistaken. Arnold's purpose is mainly a moral purpose. Trilling's is political and intellectual—and moral in a different

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sense. Where Arnold touches politics, he shows a fear of massed philistines and democrats, and he prays in aid from poetry and the benevolent state. He thinks, moreover, that the historical ingredient in works of the mind is negligible or misleading. On all these points Trilling is his habitual opposite. To be sure, both men use literature to frame a theory of life, but the stance of the *politique et moraliste* is no monopoly of Arnold's. It is a common role since the early 19th century, and it implies no common outlook.

The deep difference between Trilling and Arnold derived from their dissimilar upbringing and situations. In the 1930s a young American who would be a critic faced, in life and art, the choice between a reactionist aestheticism upholding the autonomy of the work of art and the Marxist interpretation (and employment) of art as a weapon in the class struggle. Like many others, Lionel was drawn to Marxism by his idealism and generous humanity; but not for long. He soon found unacceptable the apparatus imposed on thought by Marxian teachings and even more repellent the deeds of the practitioners. He began to develop his own Third Position, a position on the Left as a critic of the Left. Out of it came all the premises and conclusions in politics, art, morals, and psychology that made him from the outset unclassifiable.

SINCE THE SUCCESSIVE STATEMENTS of Trilling's thought were grounded in teaching and thinking about literature in the broadest sense, I cannot avoid saying something here about the readings and conversations that Lionel and I engaged in, first as part of our teaching duties, and later as the basis and habit and reward of our fraternal companionship. Our relation was entirely free from the restraints of egotism or envy, and free also from emotional ups and downs. I do not remember in forty-three years of weekly conferrings a single moment of irritation at anything said or done, despite my being much the more impatient character of the two. Throughout, we were always more interested in each other's mind and feelings than in the details of our separate day-to-day existence, though we did not scruple to bring these in if they were entangled with our plans and purposes. We talked of what we knew intuitively to be of common concern, an ever-enlarging field of search and reflection; and we read and discussed nearly all of each other's writings in first draft.

No false conclusions should be drawn from this intellectual communion. We agreed on innumerable points and often could not remember which idea was whose—we would say that it came "from the bank"—but we also differed, in opinion as in temperament; and we achieved without effort a total independence, an entire individuality, in our acts as in our writings. The evidence is best seen in the decisive matter of style.

Now, common literary tastes and intentions are not a sufficient foundation for lasting friendship, but a common view of life is; and it was that common view which enabled us to diverge in style and purpose, while yet imparting to our students a unified mode of thought we came to call "cultural criticism."

No such thing was recognised or in favour anywhere when we began—more by intuition than design—in the autumn of 1934. Cultural criticism was historical criticism, because it regarded circumstance as one means of understanding literature. But such an understanding is incomplete, since it leaves out intention and received meaning, which require judging the work or idea taken by itself. The need, we believed, was for a just union of history and formal judgment, our view of art being that in it Purpose and Necessity forever play hide and seek.

Cultural criticism was inevitably damned for overlooking the autonomy of the work of art and its inherent indifference to meaning; for ignoring the dialectic of history and the flimsiness of the cultural "superstructure"; for neglecting the "rigorous" critical methods recently opened to those who could count metaphors, analyse themes, and trace myths. For us, a critic or student was ultimately on his own, his sole resources being strenuous reading and a demanding imagination. To this exercise, unassuming but difficult and fallible, all our preparation and all our Wednesday evenings were devoted.

WHAT WAS THE COMMON VIEW of life which underlay this wayward venture? Here, though still speaking for both of us, I return to the proposition that Trilling developed and illustrated throughout that galaxy of essays he published during the last 35 years. It is this. Intuition and perception alike show not merely that life overflows ideologies and coercive systems—so much is obvious: there would be no systems and ideologies if life were not impossibly hard to regiment. The contention is rather that the only things worth cherishing in life are necessarily destroyed by ideology and coercion from their first onset. In other words, variety and complexity are but different names for possibility; and without possibility—freedom for the unplanned and indefinite—life becomes a savourless round of predictable acts. There is then no point to literature or thought; there is in fact no literature and no thought, but a mere ideological echo of a diminished life.

For a critic, the best way to sustain the possibilist mind was clearly through the examples of literature, the lessons conveyed not by or out of

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an abstract of meanings, but out of the love and pleasure of literature itself; out of the fears and passions literature holds and radiates, out of the illusion of timelessness it inspires—feelings and illusions which can only be felt spontaneously; awakened, perhaps, but unlearned, and which constitute the chief freedom of the mind.

THIS IS THE "WORD" that Trilling felt he must utter and illumine, as indeed he did with ever-widening powers of reference and interconnection. To the very last, as in his Harvard Lectures entitled *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972) and his Jefferson Essay *Mind in the Modern World* (1974), his affirmations were opposed not solely to overt schemes of social and political repression charged with philanthropic intent, they opposed equally all other fixities professing to be sufficient or complete, whether derived from natural science, depth psychology, or peremptory moralising.

That this outlook is not a disguised anarchism, a longing for an unconditioned life, is shown in its first full exposition in the volume of essays that has given a new phrase to the language, *The Liberal Imagination* of 1950. That imagination was once expansive and generous, but time and circumstance had reduced it to a mere animus propelling certain judgments triggered by certain words and images. Political liberalism in the 1880s had responded to unavoidable pressures by becoming a programme of social management, and this explained the 20th-century liberals' sentimental attachment to the Soviet Russian society. At the same time, Western liberals retained a visceral sort of individualism and continued to demand intellectual freedom. Between these incompatibles, the liberal position amounted to a pseudo-ideology made up of pieties about the poor, the child, the criminal in our midst. It was a residual Christianity, largely negative, and which could thus be very fierce in attack and defence: attack against institutions and traditions at home, and defence of those régimes abroad that seemingly organised and enforced the good of the common man in the name of equality. For the sake of a "rational" human life, liberal culture felt it imperative to simplify.

To these reflex acts and ready-made ideas, Trilling gave in effect the rejoinder that so often marked his teaching and his conversation: "It's complicated . . . . It's much more complicated . . . . It's very complicated." The positive counterpart was, also in effect: "Continue to think and feel, and to will only what you have first fully imagined . . . ." To that imagining, literature, especially the novel, is the great inciter. The great novels are also the books that in his time Trilling could count on his readers knowing or being willing to take up. Hence his many essays on the novelists, concluding with the posthumous "Why We Read Jane Austen," published not long ago in the London *Times*.

YET THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT that Trilling's teaching of the great books that are not novels played an important part in the formation of his thought. He differed from his peers (as we flatteringly call them) in two important respects: first, he had to reread at least once a year the works that most intellectuals sooner or later reduce to handy clichés, their own or the conventional ones. At this late hour of the West, intellectual debate is often carried on between writers of equal powers but unequal armament—on the one hand, the writer who has made it his business to study a thinker or school, and against him the "well-educated" who knows what is to be said on the subject. Trilling had the advantage of repeated immersion in the facts. This explains why, unlike almost all his contemporaries, he never uttered the usual things about Rousseau (back to nature, the noble savage, a maker of paradoxes, the father of progressive education): he knew the works and rated them high.

His second advantage was that he was virtually alone among critics in not having been reared on the French critical tradition. He read the language with difficulty and escaped the force of those writers that gave Irving Babbitt, T. S. Eliot and their followers formulas from the 1890s to adapt to the 1920s: the great troop of analysts from Rémy de Gourmont and Léon Hennique to André Gide and Ernest Seillière. Of course, Trilling read Eliot and Babbitt, but they did not "take" in the proper way, the ground not being prepared by a first-hand knowledge of the French poets and men of letters.

A different tradition more than filled this gap—the English liberal tradition that includes Mill and Arnold but is not restricted to them, whatever modern opinion may say. There is Burke and Hazlitt, Bagehot and James Fitzjames Stephen, Ruskin and Morris, Yeats and even Walter Pater in his radical early days. Since the turning of liberalism on its head that I have referred to, it is increasingly difficult to make oneself clear by referring to thinkers as "liberal" or "conservative", especially when the new criteria of social democracy, which are irrelevant historically, are added to the diagnostic list. What is clear is that the men I have just cited exhibited in their time a self-critical liberalism of the kind that Trilling thought indispensable. When he deplored the lack of an intelligent conservative tradition in American literature, he meant the absence of discussion about premises and consequences such as is found in England in the liberals themselves—Mill as well as Bagehot, Stephen, and the rest. In the United States, even before the contentious 1930s, the

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party lines were so drawn that only headlong advocacy or a bland assumption of moral unanimity was to be found. The truth was that, as always in the nature of important ideas, "it's much more complicated, it's very complicated."

SO IMAGINATIVE A VISION of our 20-century predicaments and automatisms deserved to be shown in a piece of imaginative literature, and Trilling seized the earliest chance to make the attempt. The result was his novel *The Middle of the Journey*, first published in 1947 and re-issued last year, when more than one critic was pleased to call it a masterpiece. Some months after its first appearance, it attracted attention because its central figure drew upon the life and character of Whittaker Chambers, who in our day used to haunt the College campus. After the trial of Alger Hiss, inferences were made about other persons in the story; but as their creator said in the Introduction to the re-issue, the attributions are groundless.

Nor is it because of the link with a nameable hero (or villain) that the work marks a moment in our century's intellectual history, like *Fathers and Sons* or *L'Education Sentimentale*; it is because it depicts the aberration of reason and deadening of sensibility that I have been trying to suggest in discursive terms. It would take more than an essay of quasi-personal reminiscence to suggest further how *The Middle of the Journey*, whose title from Dante's opening line reminds us of the descent into Hell, was related in the author's mind to the vast subject of art in its modern role of angry prophet and exclusive saviour. Liberal unimaginativeness about society and eager advanced views in art go hand in hand, and the principle of perpetual displacement by a new avant-garde encourages the taste for restless change. A corrective judgment can only resist fashion by being comparative, that is to say, historical, but this is incompatible with taking pleasure in obsolescence. The product of all these sentimentalities is the culture-philistine, whom Nietzsche pinned on a labelled card a century ago. Multiplied since by access to (a half-) education and by the mass diffusion of art and thought, this new type of culture consumer finds a literature written for him, serving his predilections by contrived shock, routine political dissent, and sadistic assaults on the Old Philistine, long since dead, but theatrically still necessary.

IT IS AT THIS POINT that, in Trilling's work (and I may add, in mine), the maxim that literature is a criticism of life is given its continuation and counterpart: life is and ought to be a criticism of literature. Where one dips down for a sample of "life" is another question. But since the French '90s, with their separation of art from life and morality, the critical game has permitted itself a convenient double standard. High art is autonomous—nothing to do with anything outside itself; but in order to get rid of bad literature (cheap or merely unfashionable) just say it's a travesty of human life as we know it. Ridden by such ideas and seeking new ways out of the straits, writers and artists have finally arrived at anti-art, with its fine democratic overtones of Any Number Can Play, while critics have pushed back "life" to a surmised pre-infantile stage, or moved it ahead into an elective madness—all for the sake of an untroubled existence: no more effort of will, no conflict or other hard conditions. On this topic Trilling wrote one of his last essays, a brief manual for endurance under modern cultural exposure: "Art, Will, and Necessity."

ONE WISHES IN VAIN that he had embodied his perception of types and attitudes in other novels and that he had lived to finish the Memoir he had just begun about the middle of *his* journey—the 1930s and '40s. The absence of other novels is not to be explained by native bent or turn of mind. Trilling's desire to write fiction was strong. He wrote some short stories, including the superb and much anthologised "Of This Time, Of That Place", where the reader will find in the depiction of two diversely blinkered minds, who meet tangentially in the clear consciousness of a third, a prophetic refutation of the recent theories about the superiority of madness to which I have alluded. The main reason why Trilling did not write more novels is that teaching leaves too little energy and unbroken time for self-absorption, let alone for writing on the large scale. Lionel was cursed with a pedagogic conscience in a time when lofty neglect was readily permitted to men of his standing. He did not take advantage of the licence but did his duty to his students in class and conference, discharging it as if each of them too were a mind alive. This perpetual squaring of one's own mind with the demands of another's is exhausting, and the necessity of wide and repeated reading for our seminars was only part compensation.

The habit of teaching, moreover, makes the critical didactic essay seem the more accessible form of expression in the intervals of lecturing, counselling, and meeting in committee. Hence Trilling's books, composed of essays and lectures worked and reworked until they formed: *The Liberal Imagination* (1950); *The Opposing Self* (1955); *A Gathering of Fugitives* (1956); *Beyond Culture* (1965); *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972); and, in addition, the little-known series of introductions in the three volumes of readings called *The Experience of Literature* (1967), in which the reader can learn, free from polemical reference and close to the summits of world literature, what

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is meant by a literary critic of major stature.[1]

Having instanced the constraints of the academic life as a reason why *The Middle of the Journey* had no counterparts, I want to add two relevant details. Trilling received from his, or other, publishers no urging to write another novel. Indeed, the publisher of the first one, speaking to an English colleague who showed interest, shrugged it off as an unimportant excursion. In fact, Lionel Trilling's production in general was never encouraged, stimulated, by "the trade", including editors, but only by a handful of intimates.

Again, his devotion to his students requires the modifier that there were times when he was heartily sick of their presence and their needs and wanted to hide and think like a hermit in a cell. Luckily, it was in the spring that this fit would come on him, whereas my lacklustre eye tended to turn upon the group in autumn. On first acquaintance, Lionel was warmly receptive to the assorted temperaments we had chosen for the year and was immediately popular, while I seemed to them a beast, though possibly a just one. But when his friendly curiosity cooled off, I would become the refuge of the bruised. He and I would accuse each other of being a saint for enduring one or another irritating youth, but it is clear that with us saintliness was merely a seasonal weakness and not really a rooted fault of character.

Without trying, Trilling naturally made disciples, and of the best kind—not expounders of a system or repeaters of catchwords, but scholars, critics, teachers who were awakened from dogma by Lionel's "word", or who caught on the wing an idea, perhaps casually thrown off, and nurtured that germ into a free-standing plant. It would be difficult to exaggerate the spread of Trilling's ideas in these ways, for his teaching was, by the nature of his thought, a reshaping of the mind not an indoctrination. And in assessing influence one must also consider the relative effect of publishing in print and in class. The printed idea reaches an uncertain number of readers and for but a few moments. Most of them are adults and impregnable; whereas students are still plastic and they drink in during 30 to 40 hours each term, not only the words but also the presence of the thinker. The many hundreds who listened to Lionel Trilling over a span of 40 years may have believed that they were studying this or that "course"; actually they were permitting their minds to take an imprint which, given interest and admiration, is permanent.

In that same period, the young showed as always a preference for systems and methods by which the labour of learning about the world may be reduced and the degree of certitude increased. Trilling no doubt disappointed some by having no method or system to offer. In that disappointment there is always a trace of regret at not belonging to a specially equipped group—a task force for the elimination of literary problems. With his sense that intelligence is where you find it, and irreplaceable when found, Lionel was always hostile to the claims of these self-licensed groups. He attached no preferential labels to the diverse activities of the mind. He was not a "humanist" against science or social science, or a "critic" against "scholarship." Nor did he look down on the general public as an undifferentiated mass of barbarians: all his remonstrances were directed in the first place at professionals who could fight back and whose views were public and prevailing.

IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING that in 1950 Lionel Trilling greeted with interest a proposal made by a former student for starting a book club on the usual pattern, but purposing to disseminate "good books." If the scheme succeeded, it would benefit readers and authors alike, by breaking through the barriers that stand between a "trade" book and its potential buyers. To make the plan work it was necessary not only to choose several books each month, but also to introduce them to the club subscribers by means of a critical article, a review not a blurb. And this double duty being more than one man could carry, it must be shared with like-minded critics. Lionel approached Wystan Auden and me, and we performed in remarkable harmony for thirteen years, each of us writing in the form of these introductions the equivalent of a couple of volumes. It was from these small essays of his that Lionel made *A Gathering of Fugitives*.

THE PERCEPTIVE READER will have noticed well before this point that there must have been in Lionel Trilling's work an opposition of some kind between the desire to show the complexity that thought must attain in order to do reality justice and the need for lucid simplifying which teaching undergraduates or reviewing books for general readers entails. The tension was there, and it was at times painful. It was the price paid for living in our odd demotic culture and working in an institution dedicated to art and intellect yet bound by the written or spoken word. Popular standards apply throughout; only scientists have the right to be complex—or at least they have got hold of the only excuse.

[1] Among other, still scattered essays, a number deal with the thought of Freud, to which Trilling returned in many connections, too complex to discuss here. It is enough to repeat that Trilling could no more accept the reduction of literature to psychic determinants than to economic. For the "interpreters" who made clinical cases out of great novels and poems, Trilling had only good-natured scorn. Anybody possessed of even a simple liking for literature could see that "it was more complicated."

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How any of us resolves this antinomy between telling what we perceive and telling all to all obviously affects the quantity of our production and the manner of producing it. Lionel Trilling's collected essays will bulk larger than they seem to do now, because of the number of pieces—often lectures—that he never brought together. But it remains a fact that he was shackled by the contradictory requirements I am discussing: he wrote easily and fast, and he composed very slowly. Except once or twice, a finished essay would represent from five to fifteen times the number of pages it finally filled. The *Matthew Arnold* of which I read the successive chapters in countless drafts, must have consumed a dozen reams of paper.

The outcome of this struggle was Lionel's characteristic style. It is not to everyone's taste, especially if one approaches prose with preestablished patterns of how it should sound and break up its cargo of thought. But whoever is willing to let the long roll and retreat and fresh surge of Trilling's thought carry him from outset to destination will find that it is clear, firm, undeviating despite its wave-like movements, and unambiguous in its delivery of the particular complication it proposes to establish. It may seem strange that differing as we did in our aims and dispositions we could do each other any service by reading each other's first legible drafts. Let somebody else find the logic of it; each of us possessed the intuition of what the other wanted to do, and we challenged diction and thought to that end, not to redirect them to another.

This generality covers the day-to-day exchanges, so to speak. On special occasions, important exceptions occurred, on both sides. I might strongly object to what I considered an excess of elaboration, a surfeit of modifiers intended to take care of imaginable demurrers or confusions. "It's complicated *enough*!" The debate—warm from opposite convictions but never straying from the temperate zone—would often end far from its subject. By dint of illustration and argument, we would find ourselves conversing animatedly about something else, the sentence or paragraph forgotten. The ultimate decision about it would be a compromise, or the wretched thing was removed, or it was *stet* from stem to stern. One or two of Lionel's essays still bother me by what I think is too many coils of wire for the current. But those belong to the middle period—the '50s. The works of the last fifteen years strike me as the perfect matching of meaning and form.

Those divergent aims of ours are perhaps clear enough. Lionel Trilling was bent on developing the large consequences of the often hidden relations and implications for life that he found in literature. I was trying to compress great batches of fact and opinion into descriptions and conclusions that the reader of history could grasp and remember and make part of his stock of prudence or wisdom. I struggled with a different kind of complexity, appreciating it as much as Lionel did his, but trying to reduce it fairly rather than project or amplify it. My bugbear was the historian who publishes his sack of notes. The excess on my side that Lionel reproved was, therefore, a characteristic unwillingness to "go into it." Some decisive formulation of mine would make him curious, raise his antennae for the complex, and he would say, "Open it up—that sentence deserves a paragraph"; . . . or "Only a paragraph! You need a page!" Seen apart from the practical purpose in hand, these mutual summonses must at times have resembled high comedy: I wish I had been there to see it.

To speak of the comic and the practical in our friendship makes it appropriate to close these random opinions and recollections with a word more on Lionel Trilling's temperament. In one most respectful obituary, his person was described as showing to the world "a sad, solemn sweetness." This is wrong on all counts. He was not solemn or sad but, whenever chance offered, bursting with the impulse to joke, ironise, make puns, and be gaily irresponsible. He naturally did not indulge his high spirits on the platform, and his features when thoughtful or intent may have given the impression of rooted melancholy. Perhaps even with friends he may, while fishing, have looked grave: it is a solemn business, of which the platonic idea escapes me, and to which he attached great importance. But with all allowances made, his enormous *power* precludes the notion of a mild melancholic gazing at life with only an inward response.

As for sweetness, the word is again inappropriate. Lionel had great generosity as well as civility and tact, and he often gave others an impression of invariable gentleness. That was unintentionally misleading. He reserved his tender feelings for a small group, though he treated with delicacy, on principle, all who approached him and were willing to return his courtesies, social and intellectual.

This admirable conduct and character, a well-wisher who was not also a friend might be tempted to regret. Had Lionel Trilling been less shy and honourable, more moody, tempestuous, and self-willed, a likeness of him closer to the expected image of the thinker-pathfinder would have impressed itself on the public mind and made more dramatic, more emphatic the bearing of his "word." At the end of his life he knew his worth but not his "place." None of his belated panegyrists had distinctly let him know it. Nothing we can do now will repair the oversight, which has worked to our disadvantage much more than to his occasional disappointment.

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LETTERS

Shanks Replies to Shonfield

WITH MOST OF WHAT Andrew Shonfield says [ENCOUNTER, August] I can readily agree, especially since in many cases he is stressing points previously made in my article "Can Europe Reform Itself?" [ENCOUNTER, May]. I agree, and have said so many times, that the economies of the Nine are on a divergent path, and that the wide differences between them—and the evident unwillingness of the rich countries to envisage a major transfer of resources to the poorer—make any kind of harmonisation of social benefits at this stage premature. I agree, though I did not mention it in my article, that the adhesion of Greece and subsequently, no doubt, other Mediterranean countries will make political cohesion in the Community considerably more difficult. And of course I agree that it is of importance that the Community develops a common posture towards the outside world (as indeed it is beginning to do with some success).

My criticism of Shonfield is twofold. First, and less important, is his attempt to distance himself from me by distorting what I said and attributing to me views which I have not expressed and do not hold. He seeks to tar me with the old-style Federalist brush, by equating my views with "traditional Community mythology." I do not see how any careful and objective reader of my article could have made this mistake. I go out of my way to stress the fact, as does Andrew Shonfield, that there is no future in the Commission trying to bypass member-governments; and that in so far as progress is being made towards European integration it is at the level of the European Council rather than the European institutions. This is not yet the orthodoxy of Brussels federalists.

Perhaps the confusion has arisen through my possibly careless use of the word "blueprint", which Shonfield assumes without textual warrant must mean a new Treaty. I must say I had not envisaged that a re-writing of the Treaty of Rome would be a sensible or feasible practice at this stage, whatever its limitations; and in calling for a new blueprint I was emphatically *not* asking for a new legal commitment.

Indeed, one of the characteristics of the Community pundits which I most abhor is the belief that nothing which does not have written legal sanction is serious. What I had in mind rather was a Plan, a statement of agreed objectives and the means for achieving them. Even a coherent Budget relating expenditures to established priorities at Community level would be a step in the right direction.

Nor, in calling for a new blueprint, did I envisage that its purpose would be to draw up "a new European social order" (whatever that rather pompous phrase may mean). Of course, the Community has other problems as well as the social ones, and any meaningful blueprint must address itself to all the major areas of difficulty.

And yet, and yet . . . Shonfield's second weakness, if I may say so—and to me by far the more serious—is that somehow in his conspectus of Europe the people are missing. His Community is like a landscape without figures. His agenda is entirely meaningful to the chanceries; but what about the man and woman in the field, the street, the factory? The two great problems which preoccupy the people of the Community today are Jobs and Inflation; and a Community which has nothing to say on these issues will not long command their loyalties nor retain relevance in their eyes. And in that case the Common Market will go, Rome Treaty or no Rome Treaty. *That* is the importance of the social dimension in the European debate.

The survival of the Community does not in the last analysis rest on the sanction of the Treaties, but on the ability of the institutions to respond to the needs of its people. Old-style Federalists or modern trendy pragmatists, we forget this at our peril.

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The Webbs and the Jews

DAME MARGARET COLE's defence of Beatrice Webb (ENCOUNTER, May 1976) against Max Geltman's claim that she was anti-Semitic leaves one with an uncomfortable sense of having been told only part of the story. The Webb's racial attitudes were complex. They cannot be passed off as merely reflecting the standard assumptions of their day. This is so not only of their attitudes towards Jews but towards racial matters in general. *Race-thinking* is, in fact, an important, if insufficiently noted theme in their work. It became more pronounced as their Social(ist) Darwinian hopes for an egalitarian, administratively efficient and morally superior Britain were challenged by the gradual decline of Britain's international political power already evident by the turn of the century.

The Webbs, who were unabashed imperialists, tried to account for these developments, of which they strongly disapproved, in several ways. Each was a variation on a basically racialist argument.

Domestically, they argued that the British capitalist system was to blame, for having encouraged a "money selection" rather than a "natural selection" in marital matching, which had resulted in a gradual weakening of the vital Anglo-Saxon racial stock. Fanatical as they were on the subject of eradicating poverty, they were also disturbed by the decline of middle-class birth rates and the concomitant growth in numbers of the eugenically inferior poor.

Internationally, they grew increasingly apprehensive of the phenomenon of racial mixing on the larger imperial and global stage. On these points, see, for example, Sidney Webb, *The Decline of the Birth Rate*, Fabian Society Tract 131 (1907); "Destitution and Eugenics", in the Webbs' *The Prevention of Destitution* (1911); "The Dysgenic Influence", in their *The Decay*

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of Capitalist Civilisation (1923); and their "The Guardianship of the Non-Adult Races", *New Statesman* (1913). Readers may also wish to consult J. M. Winter, "The Webbs and the Non-White World: A Case of Socialist Racialism", *Journal of Contemporary History* (1974).

WHAT HAS ALL THIS to do with the Webbs' purported anti-Semitism? Simply that an ingrained habit of racial stereotyping (a commonplace to anyone acquainted with Beatrice's manuscript diaries)[1] lent to their characterisation of Jews a distinctly repugnant air.

Examples abound, quite aside from the breezy unpleasantness of Beatrice's depiction of London's East End Jews in the early essays to which Max Geltman refers. In their formal sociological work, there is, for example, the ingenious hypothesis, advanced in their *Industrial Democracy*, that there are three races of wage earners—the Anglo-Saxon, who will not work below a customary standard of life, but who has no maximum; the African Negro, who has no assignable minimum, but a very low maximum; and the Jew, who, they complacently conclude, "is unique in possessing neither a maximum nor a minimum"!

In practical politics, there is the matter of Sidney's anti-Zionist reputation while Colonial Secretary in the second Labour Government, his handling of the implementation of the Palestine Mandate so controversial as to produce the extreme step of Ramsey MacDonald's removal of the task from his Ministerial jurisdiction (a matter over which, despite great clamour for his resignation, Webb refused to go).

And anecdotal materials are rich enough to allow random selection. There is Beatrice's remark about the Australian Attorney-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs, in the course of their 1898 world tour, that he was "a typical clever young Jew" with "thoroughly Jewish" wiles, who "Like many clever pushing Israelites presumes too much on the stupidity of the Gentile." Or there is the letter she wrote home on their second world tour, in 1911, with the news they had just dined with the powerful Mitsui family, explaining that their yellow-skinned hosts occupied in Japan a position akin to the Rothschilds in Europe, and expressing amusement that they even had "the Jewish look"!

Autobiographically, Beatrice speculated about the possibility of there being Jewish blood in her own family line. In *My Apprenticeship* she tells us that her paternal grandmother, "a tall dark woman of Jewish type", who read Hebrew and was obsessed by the mania of leading the Jews back to Jerusalem, actually got as far as Paris before being overtaken by the family and committed to a lunatic asylum. It was a set of circumstances, she says, "always referred to as a slur on our birth". But the gypsy element in the family tree clearly appealed to her sense of mystery. Beatrice's inveterate stereotyping, moreover, extended to encompass her earliest recorded impressions of her future marital partner. Interestingly, the diary entry recording her first meeting with Sidney Webb lists as his most striking physical features "a Jewish nose, prominent eyes and mouth."

It is further noteworthy that the Webbs' first biographer, Mary Agnes Hamilton (like Mrs Cole, socialistic and warmly sympathetic to the Webb legend), was at pains, writing in 1933, to lay to rest any lingering speculation about the possible Jewishness of the celebrated socialist intellectuals. Beatrice did have dark colouring, she admitted, while insisting that Mrs Webb's fine aquiline nose was "the true dominant nose, Roman rather than Hebraic." She acknowledged, further, in the case of Sidney, that though his appearance—"the thick nose and lips, abundant hair, small stature, and sensitive hands and feet, the eyes concealed by eye-glasses"—did at first glance "give him the air not only of a Jew but a Jew of Continental origin", he was otherwise "markedly deficient in Jewish traits of mind or character. He is not artistic; he is indifferent to money; he much prefers the knowledge of facts to the possession of cash, unassuming, modest and disinterested, he is totally devoid of personal 'push'." She went on to clinch the point by observing, on a triumphant note: "The evidence of his ancestry, anyhow, disposes of the hypothesis. On both sides the line of descent is purely English: Anglo-Saxon English!" Such literary overkill may have conclusively disposed of the intriguing prospect of the Webbs as a case study in "Jewish-socialist hatred of Jewishness."

But that question aside, a first-hand acquaintance with the work of the Webbs, published and unpublished, can leave one in no doubt as to the low view of Jews and other racial types entertained by "the firm of Webb." Dame Margaret, like Mrs Hamilton before her, protests too much.

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[1] See my edition of Beatrice Webb's *Our Partnership* (1973).

All in the Family

ON P. 81 of the March ENCOUNTER, Mr Peter Laslett alleges that in my Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge University in November 1975 I repeated the fallacy that "marriage in traditional times lasted five to ten years", before being cut short by the death of a spouse. I have checked the notes from which I delivered the lecture, and find that I said that the mean duration of first marriage of the French plebs was 15–17 years and of the English nobility was 20–21 years. This matches pretty well with Mr Laslett's own data, and bears no relation to the nonsensical statement he claims that I made. Referring to my alleged statement, he comments that "this is no way to go about an intellectual pursuit." The comment could perhaps more aptly be applied to the irresponsible action of quoting inaccurately from memory a remark in a lecture, in order to denounce a fellow scholar in print for something he never said.

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Chinese Make-Believe

I WAS RECENTLY faced with the trying task of making head-and-tail out of that most strange phenomenon of modern international politics—the visit of ex-President Richard Nixon to Mao's China, as an honoured and distinguished guest, indeed with a mass-enthusiastic welcome as if he were still some kind of Head of State (if in Southern California exile).

I am sure it will interest, and perhaps even amuse your readers, that the only source of real enlightenment on the whole subject I found, after much phlegmatic research, in an old copy of ENCOUNTER. The article by Holmes Welch in the May 1968 number, entitled "The Chinese Art of Make-Believe", deserves reading and re-reading. It was, and certainly remains, a profound and relevant contribution to clarifying the puzzlement of things Chinese. Eight years may be a long time in international relations, but hardly in national psychology. One more good reason to keep old back-numbers of ENCOUNTER . . . .

FRANÇOIS BONDY

Die Weltwoche
Zurich

Cole & Webb

MARGARET COLE'S intemperate defence of Beatrice Webb (ENCOUNTER, May) deserves this short comment:

It is true that Mrs Webb did not find anti-Semitism in the Soviet Constitution, but neither did she find evidence of the Gulag Archipelago there. Yet both existed during Stalin's time as they do today. As I said (ENCOUNTER, March) "Beatrice Webb found much virtue in the Soviet Constitution under Stalin, and nothing but a lust for greedy profit among the poorest of the poor Jews of Whitechapel. . . ."

I think Mrs Cole objects mostly to the latter part of this sentence. She wants proof. Perhaps I can satisfy her with this—even if it leads to disappointment with her favourite Fabian.

When Beatrice Webb was a single girl doing social work in the East End of London, she wrote for *The Nineteenth Century* her opinions not only of "sweated labour", but how the sweat was induced by that "love of profit" which is "the strongest impelling motive of the Jewish race." Now that doesn't quite add up to what Margaret Cole said in her defence. Of course, there is more—much more of such racist perfidy in the works of Beatrice Webb—or Beatrice Potter as she was, or Lady Passfield as she became. For a rich instalment of the lot I direct Mrs Cole, and the interested readers, to Edmund Dilberner's fully documented essay in *Historia Judaica* XIV (1952) and to his Inaugural Address delivered at the University of Jerusalem in 1953. In fact, if one were to document all of the contempt for Jews in the writings of Beatrice and Sidney Webb it would take up almost a full-size issue of ENCOUNTER.

MAX GELTMAN

New York City

T. S. Eliot on Hardy

"WE ALL KNOW by now what a gaffe T. S. Eliot made when he tried to patronise and damn with faint—very faint—praise Hardy's achievements as a poet. Only Eliot's countryman, Henry James, has outdone Eliot's snobbish dismissal of Hardy's work as the self-expression of a self hardly worth expressing" (Robert Gittings, ENCOUNTER, July).

As a matter of fact, Eliot deals only with the prose, and in those few pages of *After Strange Gods* (1934, p. 54–57) he surely says more to the point about Hardy's shortcomings than most other critics have done before or since. But when such aspersions have been cast, what positive judgment of Hardy does Eliot leave us? That "he sometimes wrote overpoweringly well"; that his style "at times touches sublimity" that in *A Group of Noble Dames* he gave us a number of "masterly short stories"; and that as "an artist" he is probably the superior of D. H. Lawrence. Indeed, it is in terms of Hardy's pre-eminence as an *artist* that Eliot had already bestowed high praise on *The Dynasts* ("The Possibility of a Poetic Drama", *The Sacred Wood*, 1920, p. 66). And since for Eliot art was an "escape from personality", it follows that Hardy must repeatedly have triumphed over the "personality" which Eliot denigrated.

It is difficult to see what "gaffe" is here committed, what "snobbish dismissal" this constitutes, or how such praise can be described as "very faint."

E. W. F. TOMLIN

Tall Trees, Morwenstow,
Cornwall

IS THE TAXING OF WAR WIDOWS' PENSIONS LEGAL?

Two Members of the Treasury and a solicitor for Inland Revenue have informed me that the Act to impose the tax on the war pensions paid to the widows of the men killed in war, or who died of war wounds, while defending England, was passed in 1842!! In 1972 the Law Commissioners informed me that the tax was imposed by a 'POLICY' of 1919 (yet tax imposed by 'policy' is illegal).

On the 25th March, 1976, in the High Court of England the solicitor for Inland Revenue said the Act to impose the tax was passed in 1952, but on the 27th May, 1976, still in the High Court, the Judge insisted the Act was passed in 1970!! Who do I believe?

Laura Connolly
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A Jewish Jesus?

ALTHOUGH Hyam Maccoby's informative article [ENCOUNTER, February] on New Testamental analysis has at least enabled me to understand what underlies the work of E. Stauffer, as well as the reason for the somewhat Marcionite resistance to a specifically Jewish interpretation of Jesus, I would nevertheless like to question his question: "Is the Jewish Jesus dead?" For there seems to me no certainty that, outside of modern exegesis, such a Jesus existed.

Granted that the figure of Jesus, a kind of *ad hoc* ensemble of attributes, is partly a product of Jewish history, the fact still remains that no acceptable or reliable account of Jesus's teachings, ministry or passion, let alone personality, occurs in Jewish writings of the relevant Tannaitic period. The five or so commonly known basic, though uncertain, references (*Baraitha Sanhedrin* 43a, *Abodah Zarah* 16b, 17a; *Tosefta Hullin* II, 22, 23, 24; *Babylonian Talmud Shabbath* 116a, b), their doubtful origin and dating aside, tell nothing of a Roman trial and crucifixion central to Christian tradition and of course to the Western Creed. Writers of the time, Philo, Justin of Tiberias, and Josephus, likewise provide no clues that would enable us to construct a "Jewish Jesus" of any kind.

And here, it seems to me, is the real crux of the matter, for Maccoby, compelled to rely on Christian testimony, cannot but ignore the question of whether Jesus in fact ever existed, even as a kind of Unknown Soldier on foreign territory.

It is a curious feature of history and hence also of the historical, as distinct from the religious, approach to the New Testament, that those issues which yesterday seemed settled for once and all somehow recur to importune our attention. For example, it is now clear, probably for the first time, that we cannot, methodologically, lump Jesus with Socrates, Joan of Arc, or Mohammed. For their roots are beyond dispute and the memory of their existence is an unmistakable part of their native culture. But the account of Jesus' life, the Gospels—written, not in Hebrew or Aramaic, but in a relatively obscure form of Greek, probably a *lingua franca*—are historically linked not with Judea but with Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, and Ephesus.

But perhaps the chief objection to a "Jewish Jesus" lies in the fact that Jewish tradition has from the beginning rejected the Christian interpretation of Jewish history and hence of the Jewish Messianic vision. This notable historical fact cannot be obscured by reference to obstinacy, that is, by recourse to an argument from psychology.

In short, the "Jewish Jesus", a contradiction in symbols, inevitably sidesteps the primary issues, leading us instead, in one way or another, to the popular and superficial rendering of the Jesus figure, Jewish or otherwise.

NIEL HIRSCHSON

Johannesburg

MR HIRSCHSON likes the theory that Jesus never existed, most recently argued with some force by G. A. Wells (*Did Jesus Exist?*, 1975). The weakness of this view is that it fails to account for the genuinely Jewish (Pharisee) characteristics of Jesus's personality and teachings, which are likely to derive from an early historical tradition, since they could not have been invented by editors who show, elsewhere in the Gospels, great ignorance of Judaism.

I agree that the Talmud is silent (in effect) about Jesus. But it is also silent about the other failed Messiahs of the period: Judas of Galilee, Athronges, and Theudas. As for Josephus, his silence is debatable; there was probably a genuine reference to Jesus behind the edited Jesus passage.

Mr Hirschson's penultimate paragraph is very confused. It is no objection to the "Jewish Jesus" that Jews "from the beginning" rejected Christian ideas. In the phrase of one great scholar: "Jesus was not a Christian."

Mr Hirschson's Talmudic citations are inaccurate. "Baraitha" is not part of the title. Only the first two of his citations concern Jesus; the others concern later disciples. The first two citations (not just the fourth) are from the Babylonian Talmud.

On the broader issues involved, I reserve comment for the symposium of New Testament scholars which has been arranged for a later issue of ENCOUNTER.

HYAM MACCOBY

London

"Grim Argument"

TERRORISTS are fanatics—that is, they are striving to attain a goal and to such an extreme that they lose perspective of their actions. The value of human life is lost somewhere in the struggle, therefore threats of a death penalty would not affect them. If their fanaticism is of ultimate importance then they will be willing to sacrifice their lives. When the Arab terrorists barged in and murdered the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, they knew that they were risking their lives. Their desire to murder the Israelis overpowered their drive to live.

Furthermore, wouldn't killing terrorists merely make martyrs of them? This state of martyrdom could in turn help the terrorists. Death has a certain impact such that it would make the public overlook the bad deeds and instead sympathise with the condemned terrorists. Lord Brockway obviously expresses sympathetic tendencies in his comment about the Price sisters: "While guilty of criminal bombing [they] are otherwise of good moral character." The implication is that these girls are not totally bad despite the fact that they blew innocent people up.

Mr Greer suggests that "It is at least possible that the death penalty for terrorist murder would not be a new source of terror but of reassurance, in setting a visible limit to the bounds of social tolerance." In other words, the death penalty would pacify the general public. However, one is then compelled to

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make the distinction whether the welfare of the people or that of the nation is more important. While people would feel safer knowing the consequences of terrorist murders, the nation would still be forced to assume the burden of the problems that arise from executions. Terrorists have often in the past (as was the case with the Symbionese Liberation Army) been known to retaliate. It could be that in the light of execution terrorists would strike again but this time twice as hard.

In my opinion terrorists and murderers deserve punishment equal in severity. The *form* of penalisation does pose a problem. I agree with Mr Greer that life sentences are not suitable solutions; however, persons with the capacity to participate in terrorist activities must not be set free. Perhaps some system of supervised labour could be utilised. To acknowledge terrorists as full-fledged murderers is essential.

NAOMI POLLOCK

Groton,
Massachusetts

THERE IS MUCH that is all too tenuous in Herb Greer's article "Grim Argument" [ENCOUNTER, April]. There is, for example, too casual a reckoning with arguments *contra* the death penalty. Mr Greer enumerates the objections to the death sentence but, without any real attempt to reply, he turns around and with a "Well, but really", presents his reasoning for levying the death penalty on terrorist murderers.

Here again, there is something disappointing in the conclusions formed. In a sense Mr Greer espouses hanging merely as a show of force with possible psychological benefits; but, mark, a *show* of force.

It would seem to me that a more concrete line of action would be to deal with the causes of terrorist acts. Why do the terrorists terrorise? Would not UN-supervised conferences between the peoples whom terrorists supposedly represent and the antagonised governments be a more productive means of effecting an end to this phenomenon of the 19th and 20th centuries? "Politically naive" and "hopelessly idealistic"? Yet such scepticism with "idealism" is precisely a major barrier to the elimination of violence in society. Violence clearly does not force a government to capitulate. It is rational conversation, sensitivity, willingness to compromise in the sense of the Wilsonian "peace without victory", that will lead to the general happiness of all. It is the courage to come together in serious conference that becomes the challenge of our century. History is rife with examples of what obstinate unreasonableness leads to. With a heritage of more than 2000 years of written history, ours is the most enlightened century to exist on earth. Nevertheless, violence is simply decried rhetoric, action is kept at a minimum by hubris and cowardice. The UN prefers to stand by, its effectiveness questioned, rather than prove its worth as the most enlightened of worldly institutions.

ANSELMO REYES

Emasculating Manliness

IN CONNECTION with your "Life & Letters" item on Sexism (ENCOUNTER, July, p. 97), it will surely not surprise you that the details of "discrimination"—waitress, barman, Manchester—which *The Times* of London offers are not restricted to the British Isles.

May I offer you a passage from the recent minutes of a meeting of the faculty governing body at the University where I teach? It is characteristically devoid of interest but for this item which, I suspect, will amuse your readers.

ACADEMIC SENATE MINUTES

Moved by Conner and seconded by Gilliard: *That the term "chairman", rather than "chairperson", be used throughout the PTR document.*

Conner argued that this was the historically correct way to use the term. Then Gilliard pointed out that the feminist attempts to remove the maleness from English cause some ridiculous problems. *E.g. "vir"* is laudatory Latin for "man", so that "virtue" etymologically means "manliness." *Mas* is Latin for "male", so that "masturbation" etymologically means "excitation of the male." Thus, to get the maleness out of English requires that both "masturbation" and "virtue" be abandoned. Further, "to get the maleness out" can be simply said: "to emasculate." Gilliard argued that an emasculated English would result in a language not only ridiculous but effeminate.

Dunn argued against removal of chairperson from the document. Nichols, opposed to the amendment (and to virtue as well?), stated that he thinks it important to respond to the symbolic claims of women in society.

Conner noted that those supporting such use of the language were ignorant; Nichols replied that as leader of the Know-Nothing Party he called for the question.

Despite, or perhaps because of, such reasoned and delightful arguments, virtue lost, and the motion failed.

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"The English Sickness"

FASCINATING THOUGH the views of Peregrine Worsthorne and Henry Fairlie on "The English Sickness" in your January issue are, I have the impression that they only scratch the surface. I have formed a completely different theory of the "English Sickness."

In many parts of Western Europe city life developed vigorously during the Middle Ages and thus a self-conscious middle class grew up. They had a lot of self-respect and their values and their way of life stood on their own feet. They did not have to look enviously at the land-owning aristocracy. In England such development was minimal. Only when the Industrial Revolution came did a middle class begin to be formed —a mere two centuries ago! They have always been lacking in self-respect, have failed to develop bourgeois values of their own, and have always had the one ambition to ape the aristocracy which alone was thought to be a class worthy of respect. During the 19th century, many members of this class, together with the younger sons of the genuine aristocracy, were willing to endure incredible hardships, both physical and emotional, in order to build and administer an Empire. For Empire-building and Empire-running, though a hard life, was next best to the life of the feudal aristocracy. It provided status and endless opportunity for authority; it freed its servants from menial work and offered the prestige which the aristocracy of all Western countries always derived from their military habits. In the shape of natives, it provided the tenants and serfs which are so essential a part of feudal society.

On the Continent, a middle class which looks back to the Fuggers of Augsburg and the Medici of Florence knows that probity is its own reward and better than aristocratic arrogance even if it is often tempered by charm. In England, probity tends to be regarded by the bourgeoisie, at most, as a poor second best. As a result, the more sensitive and

From a Secret Moscow Tape: . . . .

Moscow

OSTENSIBLY *the Scientific Council of the Institute of Linguistics of the Soviet Academy of Science was meeting to review the work of a senior researcher before reappointment ("recertification") to his post. Normally, such a matter is pro-forma.*

But on March 25 this year, the senior scientist—said by U.S. and Soviet linguists to be the best in his field—was tried for political nonconformity by the institute behind closed doors. The secretly taped proceedings show what criteria his academic judges used.

One council member declared:

"It doesn't matter if your [scientific] theories are successful or not, scientific and political positions are not of the same importance."

Another insisted:

"Mistakes in scientific work are one thing, but ideological mistakes are quite another thing. They are simply awful . . . and must be judged most harshly."

A third said, citing official rules certifying scientists:

"Evaluating the work of a Soviet scientist cannot be narrowly academic, they require definite political and moral standards as well."

A fourth said:

"Igor Alexandrovich is trying to claim that it is a personal matter—this statement against Soviet ideology. That is impermissible."

And so it went, focusing on his political faults and virtually ignoring his scientific abilities.

IGOR A. MELCHUK, *43, who has been compared to a leading U.S. linguist, Noam Chomsky, was fired from the Institute. His books are to be withdrawn from libraries. Other books referring to his works must be revised. Professionally, he is dead here and evidence that he lived is being erased.*

Mr Melchuk had asked for it. He knew well the limits of non-conformism permitted in the Soviet system and he stepped deliberately beyond them.

His career is marked by both academic brilliance and difficulties with people ("outspoken," admitted a friend; "impudent," complained a judge). He fitted into the system poorly from the start.

He had trouble entering graduate school despite a top average at the university. His graduate adviser was fired for associating with Nobel prize-winning author Boris Pasternak and Mr Melchuk wrote a letter to the Higher Education Ministry defending the professor.

He left graduate study then, to work on language translation by machine. A series of articles on the subject earned him a candidate (between an MA and PhD) degree in a highly unprecedented recognition of his abilities.

BUT HE WAS NOT *permitted to defend his doctoral thesis, for by that time he had signed other letters. One had asked "understanding" for dissident writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky in 1966; another protested the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Then he recanted.*

Mr Melchuk acknowledged during the March meeting, "I expressed my regret for past statements. Frankly, I did so only because I was afraid. I acted cowardly. But I'm tired of fear. I have no more fear."

The recanting had done him little good. At least seven times between 1971 and last year, the tran-

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intelligent members of the middle class like to identify both in *mores* and dress with the working-class, rather than the other way round. In English one has to use a French word to describe the middle class, and there is no English equivalent for the German *gut bürgerlich*. The Buddenbrooks of Lübeck are a very different kettle of fish from the characters who inhabit Middlemarch. And compared with the Castorps of Hamburg, the Forsytes are upstarts.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN ENGLAND continues to the present day as something in between, without pride in values of their own. The worst of it is that the working class, as they are becoming more affluent, cannot become absorbed into or identify readily with the middle class, for the latter are themselves wishing to be aristocrats and do not respect themselves as bourgeois and are not proud of their own values. On the Continent there is no Lord Peter Wimsey; but in England, Bertie Wooster, stupid though he is, commands an affection which is not accorded, not even in Vienna, to Graf Bobby. The real problem is not Trade Union intransigence and the lack of serious ideas (as your two contributors suggest) but the English bourgeoisie's lack of self-respect and their inordinate admiration of the landed aristocracy. Working-class militancy would be less selfish if there could be the same sort of *embourgeoisement* of the working class as there is on the Continent. As to ideas, the English have generated many, if not more, than anybody else. But it is true that they like to treat them with aristocratic disdain and in most University Common Rooms the atmosphere is reminiscent of the Fox Hunt or of Lord's. By contrast, the Continental scholar treats ideas as if he were a Banker nursing his ledgers.

The alleged sickness is not necessarily fatal. It even has many advantages. In England, Parliamentary institutions are stronger than on the Continent because they are an adaptation of feudalism to

.... *The Case of Igor Melchuk*

script shows, he was not allowed to travel abroad to scientific conferences.

Victoria Yartseva, the institute's director, said:

"We did not send Igor Alexandrovich abroad, because every Soviet scientist represents our system and our Soviet ideology abroad and Igor Alexandrovich always emphasises: 'It's mine; it is my personal opinion.'

"Because of the monolithic nature of the Soviet state and people, we cannot be divided that way. It is I, and all the rest of the Soviet people are somewhere aside. It is not we, it is they. We cannot live that way: either Igor Alexandrovich is with us or he is with them."

PROFESSIONALLY, *Mr Melchuk has many publications to his credit—more than 150 in 20 years, which is more than written by many who sat in judgment. A West German publishing house in 1971 offered to publish his major work. "Sense: Text," in its entirety, but the Soviet Linguistic Institute refused permission. The first volume of that work appeared here in 1974 but the second half, which should have appeared simultaneously, has still not come out and is now badly outdated.*

Whether from professional frustration or personal need to speak out again, Mr Melchuk abandoned his public silence of several years with a letter to The New York Times *defending Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov. It appeared Jan. 25 and seemed almost calculated to bring down the roof.*

"I am not allowed to express my opinions in the U.S.S.R.," he wrote. Many Russians "strongly disapprove the dirty campaign" against Mr Sakharov, who is "perhaps the last honest scientist" here.

Members of the science academy were "soulless puppets," he wrote:

"A powerful nation of between 25-50 million, guided by the unscrupulous and having at its disposal first-class brains with no hearts may prove highly dangerous.

"Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam and Angola show Western impotence," he concluded.

Whatever its merits, that letter had apparently not been read by any of Mr Melchuk's judges. A voice from the audience, from which "outsiders" were barred, asked to know its contents. The Institute's deputy director replied that he had not seen it "but so far as I know, it is written in support of Sakharov and reduces to three points," which he recounted, not inaccurately.

Mr Melchuk then offered to read and discuss the letter with anyone, but only after the council's decision on his future. "The thing is," he said, "that I consider it impermissible to mix the question of my recertification with my letter."

As the Institute's chief Yartseva concluded,

"For many years, we tried to save you, Igor Alexandrovich, but you treated us badly. You don't respect our collective. We could help you remain with us but you don't want it. . . . We know very well that the world is divided into two parts and you appeal to our enemies!

"I think that this open discussion has been useful," she then said abruptly.

Mr Melchuk asked for a final word. Mrs Yartseva refused. "Everything is clear," she said.

Robert C. Toth

in a dispatch from Moscow to the **Los Angeles Times**

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modern society. On the Continent they are weak, because they are based on ideology and political theory. On the intellectual side, too, there are compensations. London is second only to New York as a truly metropolitan city, because it has never been dominated by its burghers. Empire or no Empire, there is no other city in the world where race and religion and ethnic parochialism are genuinely transcended. Rome and Paris, not to mention Hamburg and Vienna, are provincial by comparison.

IT IS ONLY NATURAL that the working classes, unable to melt into a middle class because the middle class themselves cannot find a traditional sense of identity and are forever hoping to creep into the aristocracy, are digging in. Hence the intransigence of the Unions Peregrine Worsthorne is complaining of. The absence of a defined, self-respecting, and identifiable middle class is responsible for the fact that ideas are not taken more seriously than the Fox Hunt. Hence Henry Fairlie's complaint. The crisis is naturally intensified by the disappearance of the Empire which used to provide an opportunity for pseudo-aristocratic living.

But an intensified crisis is not a sickness and even if it were a sickness, sicknesses of this kind are never terminal. If the absence of a middle class makes it impossible for the working class to live like the bourgeoisie and forces them to dig in and be intransigent, this may well tempt the people who can no longer live a pseudo-aristocratic life in the colonies to think again. They may end up by accepting the inevitable and become proletarianised. After all, there is no reason why the course of English social history should conform to that of Continental countries just because England has joined the EEC.

PETER MUNZ

Victoria University,
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New Zealand

AUTHORS

Francis King's most recent novel is *The Needle*, published in 1975 by Hutchinson who will bring out his new volume of short stories, *Hard Feelings*, in the autumn.

George F. Kennan (born 1904) has had a distinguished career as diplomat and historian. He entered the United States Foreign Service in 1926, and in 1952 was appointed US Ambassador to the USSR. He spent the years 1953–61 at the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton, and from 1961–63 was US Ambassador to Yugoslavia. His numerous works on history and foreign policy include *The Realities of American Foreign Policy* (1954), *Soviet-American Relations 1917-20* (2 vols., 1956, 1958), *Russia, the Atom and the West* (1958), *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (1961). The two volumes of his *Memoirs* were published in 1967 and 1973, and *The Marquis de Custine and his "Russie en 1839"*, appeared in 1972; *American Diplomacy 1900-1950* has recently been re-issued by University of Chicago Press.

G. R. Urban is a journalist and writer on contemporary history, who lives in England. His recent appointments include Senior Research Associate at the University of Southern California, Research Fellow at Indiana University, Bloomington, and Academic Consultant to Radio Free Europe. He is the editor and co-author of *Can We Survive Our Future?* (Bodley Head, 1972), *Toynbee on Toynbee* (Oxford University Press, 1974), and *Détente* (Temple Smith, 1976).

Michael Wharton's ENCOUNTER profiles of the characters he created in his *Daily Telegraph* "Peter Simple" column include "Dr Heinz Kiosk" and "Rentacrowd" (April and May 1975), and "The Dutt-Paukers" (February 1976). The illustrations are by **ffolkes.**

David Moller is an English journalist. He was educated at Cambridge and at the Sorbonne, and has travelled widely in the United States, Europe, and Asia. He has written for various British and American publications, including the *Daily Telegraph* Magazine, *Reader's Digest*, and the *New York Times*.

François Bondy is an editor of the monthly *Schweizer Monatshefte* and of *Die Weltwoche* (Zurich) to which he contributes a regular column on people and politics in Europe.

John Fuller's most recent book of poems is *The Mountain in the Sea* (Secker & Warburg, 1975).

Anthony Thwaite's new volume of poems, *A Portion for Foxes*, will be published by Oxford University Press next spring.

Jacques Barzun has been Professor of History, Columbia University, since 1945, and was from 1958–67 Dean of Faculties and Provost. His many books include editions of Byron's and Berlioz' letters (1953 and 1954), various works on Race and Music, and more recently *The American University* (co-author, 1968) and *On Writing, Editing and Publishing* (1971). He is now literary adviser to Charles Scribner's Sons in New York.

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Glasgow

OFFICIAL CRIB: *Students have given themselves a licence to crib. And it is all thanks to the latest American invention: The essay "bank."*

The students' union at Glasgow University has collected 400 essays for the use of members who would like to copy them out and re-submit them under a different name.

But they will not be used in sociology, where continuous assessment of essays is made in awarding degrees.

Students have agreed not to stockpile essays in sociology, after protests from staff that this could lead to widespread cheating and false marks. An essay bank is already in operation at Kent University. Militant Marxists there are trying to undermine official courses by duplicating up to 40 copies of essays. A Glasgow University official said yesterday that there was a lot of concern in the Senate about the essays. However, "we have decided to see how it operates in practice before making any further decision."

William George, vice-president of the students' representative council, said "Some people have said this could be a charter for cheating, and we realise that it could be abused by students. But we have decided advantages outweigh possible abuses."

The essays will all be re-typed by the representative council's staff, who are paid out of public funds.

DAILY MAIL

London

ANATOMY OF POLITICS: You quote Mr Peter Hain, who is the best leader that the Young Liberals have got, as saying that if there were a coalition "the bottom would fall out of the party leaving only a public school rump." As a rump and a bottom are one and the same thing this would be an interesting physical achievement. One concludes that either the Liberal party has two bottoms, having so little up top, or that Mr Peter Hain cannot tell his arse from his elbow.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

London

DRUTHERS: "Everyone knows the story that before the battle Wolfe recited Gray's 'Elegy' and said that he would rather have written it than take Quebec. . . . The legend is a pretty distinction among our military men. No one has suggested that Trenchard would rather have written 'The Waste Land' than have terror-bombed Iraq" (a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*).

No one, for that matter, has suggested that Eliot would rather have "terror-bombed Iraq" than written "The Waste Land." But things are not quite as simple as this peevish reviewer seems to think.

It has been suggested (by the critic Julian Birdbath) that Field-Marshal Kitchener would rather have written Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* than have won the Battle of Alamein. Can anyone disprove it?

DAILY TELEGRAPH

Chicago

THESIS/ANTITHESIS: In his comments on the première of the Adam Smith film yesterday, Mr Ross Davies in *The Times* Business Diary reported me [writes Ronald Coase, Professor of Economics, University of Chicago Law School] as "declaring" that "most economists are Marxists."

In this Mr Davies's account is not completely accurate. What I said was "most economists are not Marxists."

THE TIMES

London

CHARISMA: *The distribution of the word* charisma *in English-language contexts after 1922 (in which year Max Weber's use of the same word in German was posthumously published) is a matter which is perhaps not open to a satisfactory solution [writes Robert Burchfield, Chief Editor, The Oxford English Dictionaries].*

It is exceedingly difficult to locate printed examples of words used by a writer whose works are known, commented on, and partially but not systematically translated until some time after his death. Nevertheless, spurred on by the salutary remarks of Professor Julius Gould, we have now traced an early example of the adjective charismatic, *apparently in its Weberian sense, in T. Abel's* Systematic Sociology in Germany *(1929), chapter 4, page 150, and of the noun* charisma *in a context of 1932: "The sources of domination include . . . authority . . . usurpation, charisma . . . wealth, and imperialism." (H. Becker and L. von Wiese,* Systematic Sociology, *chapter 23, page 309.) In practice, however,* charisma *might have been used by any English-speaking sociologist or political scientist in the 1920s who was aware of the primary value of the work of Max Weber, just as Professor Donald MacRae claimed.* Concedo veris.

THE TIMES

Paris

FRANGLAIS: *Has Pierre Salinger, the former press secretary to the late President Kennedy, lost some of his English since becoming a correspondent to the French magazine,* L'Express*? Marking the visit of French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Mr. Salinger has co-perpetrated a Bicentennial song with Gilbert Becaud, the French musician, who will sing it at the French Embassy dinner tonight honouring President Ford. The Salinger lyrics read in part, as released in English:* **"I am not Mr. Jefferson/ who made freedom sound like fun,/ that he knew from the start what should be done./ The rights of man, justice are his son./ Two hundred years ago we won."**

NEW YORK TIMES

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